

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: BUILDING FOUNDATIONS: THE
PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE OF
DOING ACADEMIC ADVISING

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This phenomenological study examines the advising experiences of six academic advisors at a large state university, including those of the author.

By engaging in the phenomenological method of inquiry, the author explores the nature of doing academic advising with college students. The writings of two philosophers—Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer—provide insight into the existential aspects of phenomenology and lived human experience. The writings of Edward S. Casey and the guidance of Max van Manen help to further illuminate the nature of human science research, providing an essential grounding for this exploration.

The engagement with other advisors through narratives and anecdotes, written reflections, and individual and group conversations, provided insight into their lived experiences. These conversations helped unearth the underlying pedagogical turning toward an-other, the foundation of the relationship between advisor and student.

This phenomenological study engaged the metaphor of building a house by examining the academic and personal “building” between advisors and students throughout a student’s college experience, and within the context of each advising session. The exploration of this metaphor deepens the understanding of the relationship between advisor and student in the lived experience of doing academic advising.

At its core, academic advising centers on the relationship between advisor and advisee, and understanding the pedagogical nature of the turning toward an “other” is critical to the creation of that relationship. Recommendations for the profession emphasize the continued personal engagement with “other” over the creation and implementation of procedures aimed at expediency. The experience of “doing” academic advising must focus on the human nature of the relationship, re-minding us of our connection to our students. Individual advisors should also continue to engage with one another through professional development opportunities, and seek out the advising experiences of others to help them develop their own approaches and to round out their own understandings of the dynamic nature of the advising relationship. Ultimately, we must allow each student to guide us in our understandings of the nature of this phenomenon since it is through their eyes, words, and experiences that we find our calling displayed.

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS: THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL
EXPERIENCE OF DOING ACADEMIC ADVISING

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University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2007

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is somewhat mind-boggling that I am now approaching the end of my formal education. I have been a student since I was five years old, and cannot begin to contemplate my life without that title. As I think back over these many years in that role, I realize the tremendous impact that my many life's teachers have had upon me.

I am so thankful to be able to share this experience with the wonderfully supportive individuals who make up my dissertation committee. I have traveled a long road here at the University of Maryland, and I am deeply appreciative that all of you have shared this journey with me, some from the very beginning. It really says a lot to me that I have known each of you at least ten years (and some of you closer to twenty!). Heartfelt thanks must first go to Dr. Francine Hultgren, who opened up my mind to the journey that is phenomenology, and allowed me to rediscover my lost love of writing poetry. Francine, your willing engagement with me at every step of this experience, and timely reminders about progressing, are surely the reason I am here today. I must also thank Drs. Marcy Marinelli and Susan Komives for introducing me to the world that is student affairs. It is hard to imagine what my life would be like today without having had the truly special experience of meeting and working with both of you. I am deeply appreciative of your many years of support and mentorship. I must thank Dr. Sue Briggs for teaching me the notion of true engagement with students. Sue, your commitment to meeting your own students where they are has greatly impacted my own personal and professional choices and commitments. And finally, how fitting that Dr. David Grimsted taught me in my first

graduate class here at the University of Maryland in 1990. Thank you for your gentle support over the years, and your willingness to join me on this final journey.

I must also acknowledge the tremendous support of my family. They have surely traveled this long road with me, patiently inquiring how I was progressing, when I might be finishing, and jokingly helping me to find post-doctoral positions for when I was “finally done.” I think they cannot quite believe it is almost over either, and we will have to search as a family for another question to replace “How’s the writing coming?” Thank you, Mom and Dad, for being there throughout the process whether I wanted to celebrate or complain, and thank you, Erwin, for letting me take over the living room for weeks at a time with all of my books and my computer. Thanks also go to Faith and Hope, for licks and wags when needed.

I also wish to thank the wonderful teacher who started me on this path many years ago while I was an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin. Dr. Stanley Payne opened my eyes to the world that is academia, allowing me to dream of this very moment, and challenging me to see what kind of a difference I could make with my own students.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the tremendous support of a close network of friends who cared enough to always ask, and who always cared about the answer: Barb, Mer, Leanne, Jamila, Rachel, Lisa, and Sarah. Thank you all so much—you cannot begin to imagine how much your friendships over these many years have meant to me. I am so grateful for all of you.

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**CHAPTER ONE:
CREATING A PLACE OF THEIR OWN:
TURNING TO THE PHENOMENON OF ACADEMIC ADVISING**

Advising as a Creation of Home

I am an academic advisor for undergraduate students at a large research university and am called by the phenomenon of advising. Within a large university, there are numerous academic colleges, and within the academic colleges there are even more numerous academic departments. In many ways, the university is a city made up of assorted communities, each community housing its own families, each family establishing its own dwelling place.

My college with its 22 departments houses over 3,800 students. As an academic advisor for undergraduate students within a large university, I have come to understand the student's journey through college, and my role in it, metaphorically, like that of creating a new home. Through the process of moving in, finding the best place to study, establishing their place at the table, deciding which bedroom they like the most, undergraduate students at a large university come to experience college as their home. For many, it is their first true "home away from home."

It is easy to pinpoint this transition. New freshmen, wide eyed and wondering at the vastness of it all, move into residence halls and enter their first classroom with 400 seats in it, all of which will be filled on the first few days of class. They miss "home," are "homesick," want a good "home-cooked meal." Home, dating from before the 12th century, indicates a place where people feel relaxed and comfortable. From the Middle English *hom*, and from the Old English *hAm*, a village, "home" is akin to the High German *heim*, home. We understand home as a social unit formed by

a family living together, a familiar setting, a familial environment (www.m-w.com). After the students return from Thanksgiving that first semester, they talk about how good it is to “come home”—they have established their new home, created new families, found their space within the dwelling-place they are creating that is the college experience. Academic advisors play a central role in assisting students who are building their dream house, although we sometimes have to help with reconstructing houses that have fallen into disrepair, and often assist with students who are switching neighborhoods when things don’t work out. House, deriving from the Middle English *hous*, and from the Old English and Old High German *hus*, is defined as a dwelling that serves as a living quarters for one or a few families, as providing a shelter or refuge (www.m-w.com).

As advisors we spend a lot of time building our own houses through our academic advising experiences. We create houses, refuges, within our offices and seek to establish a home in the spaces we create for our advising relationships with students. We serve as contractor, builder, zoning consultant, interior decorator, and sometimes rental agent for the students with whom we interact.

In many ways, the metaphor of building a house is an appropriate one in the experience of academic advising. The foundation which students lay for themselves academically has a great impact on their college experience, and certainly for their lives after college. The stronger the foundation, the better the house. The structure which exists to allow academic advisors to work with students also lends itself to the metaphorical experience of building a house. The phenomenological experience of

doing academic advising calls to be a part of the creation and building of the traditionally four year project that is college.

Building the House

Quality advisement promotes the creation of a caring environment, builds a positive public image, enhances students' development, fosters a better understanding of academic and administrative processes, rewards advisors for their work and produces primary and secondary benefits to society. (Greenwood, 1984, pp. 64-65)

I only hope they leave a meeting with me understanding what it is that they need to do next. (Jordyn, Academic Advisor)

If developmental advising is to become a reality on college campuses, the individuals serving as advisors have a responsibility to participate actively in its creation and maintenance. (Winston, Enders, & Miller, 1982, p. 8)

It is 7:45am. I look at the stack of folders that are placed in my mailbox every morning. Sometimes there are as many as fifteen—fifteen students with whom I will meet, usually for the first time, greet, and do planning. Fifteen students who, in thirty minute blocks starting at 8:30 am, will need my help to graduate, select courses for next semester, declare a major, try to get off academic warning, stay enrolled in school, sign off on study abroad forms, ask for an exception to policy, know where to go to clear a financial block on their record, give advice about what internships are available, brainstorm about what exactly one can do with a degree in French language and literature after graduation. These are fifteen students who have planned ahead, called for an appointment, and gotten in on time to see me. These fifteen do not include the 10-20 additional students I know I will see during our daily walk-in hours. These students come with any, and every, problem under the sun, and then there are some who just like to bounce ideas off somebody with an informed opinion.

What does it mean to “give” advice? As an “advise-r,” am I the actual builder or am I the building consultant? What is the relationship between giving advice and it being received? Do I create this relationship or is it created for me? In what ways do I need to listen in order to be heard?

I am called to explore the experience of doing academic advising and the relationships academic advisors establish with undergraduate students. Abram (1996) argues that

. . . The phenomenological world is remarkably stable and solid—this experienced solidity is precisely sustained by the continual encounter with others, with other embodied subjects, other centers of experience. The encounter with other perceivers continually assures me that there is more to any thing, or to the world, than I myself can perceive at any moment. (p. 39)

This understanding and interpretation that what students say, what they mean, what they need, and what they want, are all vastly different invites the continual turning to the phenomenon that is advising. The advisor creates, designs, re-creates, and re-designs, often re-doing all that has been done before, in order to lay flat the foundation upon which a baccalaureate degree is built.

Brainstorming the Layout

In this dynamic rivalry between house and universe, we are far removed from any reference to simple geometrical forms. A house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space . . . transposition to the human plane takes place immediately whenever a house is considered as space for cheer and intimacy, space that is supposed to condense and defend intimacy. (Bachelard, 1964/1994, pp. 47-48)

In building a house, often the biggest challenge is to envision the finished product before the work has begun. The end result is what one works toward, although many adjustments to the original design often are required to complete the work. Advising undergraduate students at a large research university mirrors this

building and revising process. The end goal is a known entity, graduation, but the process often needs to be adjusted as classes are closed, professors leave campus, majors are changed. In the end, the result may be quite different from the original vision, but the product is finished, nonetheless or, sometimes, abandoned for another time or altogether.

I have been an academic advisor in a variety of arenas for eight years now. It all started when I received an invitation from the Advise-5 program in the Division of Letters and Sciences, a college for students who have not yet declared a major, to work with a maximum of five students, advising them on courses, and helping them to decide on a major. All students in Letters and Sciences are required to declare a major by the end of their second year or after earning 56 credits, so the advising relationship is supposed to be temporary. It involves making suggestions for courses, making sure students are meeting their general educational (CORE) requirements for graduation, and providing some career counseling, as students who hate biology and love English struggle with how to tell their parents that they want to major in English and not go to medical school.

How does one advise students about how to tell their parents they do not want to be an engineering major? What do I say while advising a student who is finding out she has flunked calculus and cannot apply for the business school? What does it mean to advise a student? How does one become an academic advisor? Although there are many responsibilities that make up the “job” of academic advisor, it is the actual process and experience of advising to which I am called. The staff meetings, training sessions, orientations, search committee responsibilities and open houses are all part

of the job description, but I have come to understand that my phenomenological calling comes from the experience of being with the students, of engaging in the actual process of advising. **What is the lived experience of doing academic advising?**

Relatively soon after I started with Advise-5, my own group quickly turned into Advise-9, and, after a few more years, Advise-12, as the program's director referred to my advising caseload. I had a number of students who met with me once or twice during the year for academic advising and, more often than not, an informal counseling session. Most of the students came by more often. Some of them liked to talk about everything going on in their lives, while others just needed someone to tell them yes or no, whether a course was boring, whether they needed to attend the discussion section. They asked whether or not a professor was "easy," and wanted me to prove it. "Students do seem to do really well in this class, and I've heard great things about the professor," I would suggest. "Well my friend heard that he/she's mean, and takes attendance." I wonder why they asked the "easy" question in the first place if they already seemed to know the answer. Am I being tested? Why am I being tested? Is this the experience of having the tables turned? My advisor's motto is created: Friends do not let friends do advising.

Knowledge, from the 14th century Middle English *knowlege*, from *knowlechen*, meaning to acknowledge, is the fact or condition of knowing something through familiarity gained through experience or association (www.m-w.com). Knowledge, Chantrell (2002) explains, indicates recognition, identification, to know something as fact. What does it mean to undo, to un-create, knowledge? How does

the advisor challenge experience and association? How does one challenge an unknown “friend’s” perceived, and assumed, knowledge without damaging the advising relationship? What is the place of the un-known and un-present friend/roommate/teammate in an advising appointment?

Huebner (1999) suggests that as people interact with others, knowledge provides the instrument to formulate and share personal experiences:

Knowledge helps make transparent that which seems opaque. It relates events and phenomena which seem unrelated to the unknowledgeable eye. Its vocabulary and rules say to the newcomer, “Look, here is the world to explore. Others have explored it before you and left this map. Go forth and find the same wonders and joys, and eventually the same perplexities.” (p. 37)

Some of the students I advise hate it here—it is a big school, too impersonal, too many things to negotiate, too hard to get classes. I spend time reassuring them that it is not a personal failure if they want to transfer. Some of the students forget that they are here for academic reasons, and stay out much too late and drink much too much, and their grades reflect this. I spend a lot of time with these students talking about making better choices, scheduling time to study, saying “no,” and maybe limiting the partying to weekends for awhile. This kind of advising is not that for which I was trained. This kind of exchange is innate in my discussions with students. For me, it is here that advising relationships are created. What fosters the environment for this kind of giving? What allows giving to become sharing? What enables sharing to become receiving? When did I start to receive as much as I give in the advising relationship?

Winston et al. (1982) argue that the advisor has a critical role, perhaps *the* critical role, if developmental advising is to come to fruition. They suggest that

advisors have a responsibility to participate actively in the creation and maintenance of the advising relationship.

Academic advisors must challenge the institution to articulate the mission, goals, and objectives of the advising program . . . and hear advising's role in the educational mission clearly articulated. Students still need and, in fact, want a mature guiding influence during their college years. The academic advisor must realize the tremendous significance the advising relationship can have for students. Being [adult role] models for students to emulate requires a special commitment from advisors. To be successful, they must communicate their interest in students beyond talking about academic course requirements, however. (Winston et al., 1982, pp. 9-10)

After five years of working with Advise-5, I was invited to be the faculty advisor for a campus fraternity. Ideally, this would have involved meeting regularly with fraternity members, working closely with those on academic probation, and doing workshops once a month or so for all of the members. I would have been encouraged to work closely with the chapter to guide, encourage, and support the members in their academic and personal goals and achievements. Unfortunately, over the course of my two year experience with the fraternity and one year with a sorority, I found that the majority of these students were not really interested in my input or my academic knowledge. They did not care about résumé and interviewing workshops or time management skills. They were openly hostile toward discussions of academic integrity. Is this the experience of running into a figurative brick wall? It reminds me of the old story about the three little pigs, and feeling like the big bad wolf who huffs and puffs and cannot blow down the brick house. Sometimes students build walls that are so strong and so thick they cannot be breached, even with the strongest efforts.

What is the feeling of wanting to help students succeed despite themselves? What does it mean to realize that I am not making a difference, that I am wasting my time, that I am thinking of quitting? What is the experience of failing to do successful advising? Conversely, what is successful advising? What is success?

Success, from the 1537 Latin word *successus*, from *succedere*, suggests a degree or measure of succeeding, of achieving a favorable or desired outcome, an advance or succession (Barnhardt, 1995, p. 774). What happens when my desired outcome differs from that of the student I am advising, when I want the student to advance intellectually, to gain knowledge, power, a love of learning, and the student is looking to advance via an “easy A?” Do the ends always have to justify the means? Am I successful if they are successful? Can I still succeed even if they do not? Is academic success as important as, *more* important than, personal success? How is academic advising success determined?

When setting out on the journey that is academic advising, identifying the end goal often is not enough. Being able to recognize that some students use, and want, a labeled map of the next four years, while other students journey through college in a manner that sometimes appears “willy-nilly” is critical in serving the various students who inhabit the undergraduate population. Ultimately, however, both types of students eventually will need to sit down at the table with their academic contracts that identify various academic requirements, decipher the blueprints they have designed along the way, and make final decisions for the plans that remain.

Finding the Land

On every kind of journey, one moves between heterogeneous places. A beginning-place and an end-place may stand out as the most conspicuous parts of a journey—but the in-between places are just as interesting, and sometimes more so. (Casey, 1993, p. 275)

Within most colleges there already exists some form of advising structure that can provide a means for reaching out to all students. The relevant question thus concerns the nature of the advisement process and the vision and commitment of the institution to a comprehensive quality model. (Raushi, 1993, p. 5)

What is the experience of being called to advise students? It was eight years of advising experience, both good and bad, that I brought with me into my first interview for a full-time position as an advisor. The position, Senior Academic Advisor with the College of Arts and Humanities, would allow me to spend the majority of every week working with students, which I know I am meant to do. But what am I really being called to do, to create, as an advisor? What is the position really asking for beyond the objective job description?

At first I am reluctant to accept this full time position. The second interview has scared me away from the assumed power of this potential new title. Suddenly, the advisor needs advising. I call to withdraw my name from consideration. The interviewer tells me the job is mine if I want it; she asks me to please take the weekend to think about it. Over a Chinese food dinner that night with my family, I realize the job I am being invited to do will have more value for me than the one at which I have been volunteering. I commit to recognizing the challenge and meeting it. What is the experience of re-commitment? I call on Monday morning to accept the offer.

Excavating the Site

We are still at sea regarding the elusive and vexing matter of place. Like the tide, the murky waters of this matter keep returning with insistent and difficult questions. What is place in contrast with space? What does orientation in place really mean? How is place built? What does it mean to dwell in a place? How are dwelling places related to the environing natural world? (Casey, 1993, p. 146)

When I first started with the College of Arts and Humanities, I used to prepare the folders for the students I would meet with ahead of time in order to make sure that I was ready when they arrived for their appointment. Evil things, the folders. They effectively deconstruct each and every student in the University down to one single sheet of paper. Instead of Josh, Carrie, and Duane, the students become “still needs a foreign language,” “hasn’t taken a non-lab science,” and “still needs upper level credits.” I sometimes forget to look at the students when I have their folders. And the students do not see me—they see my writing on their sheet of paper. We connect through our mutual goal of filling in the blanks. It is very unsatisfying. In the beginning, though, I thought it was important to be efficient, effective, efficacious.

Then after a few weeks of back-to-back advising sessions, I realize that students do not always want efficient, effective, efficacious. They want humanity, opinion, input. They want to experience the process of “being” advised, just as I want to experience the process of “doing” advising. They want to see through the windows of the house they are building clearly, and want to be able to ask questions about the design and the various options. They want the image of personal involvement, even if the reality of a thirty minute appointment to plan for several years contradicts it. For the minimal amount of time that they are in my office, they want, desire, need, crave, a personal connection with someone who “knows,” someone who can show them a

vision of the future as it exists here, someone who can somehow, in some way, make the slightest difference in their lives as one of 28,000. For them, for that thirty minutes, that someone is me.

Richard Light (2001) suggests that good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience:

Graduating seniors report that certain kinds of advising, often described as asking unexpected questions, were critical for their success . . . advisors play a critical role. They can ask a broad array of questions, and make a few suggestions, that can affect students in a profound and continuing way. (Light, 2001, pp. 81, 84)

Students are sometimes surprised that I know what I know. “You have my SAT scores there?” several of them ask incredulously. “My high school GPA?” “I know everything about you,” I joke. I quickly stop when I see how uncomfortable some students are with that comment. I often have more information than their parents, their boyfriend or girlfriend, their roommate. I am equipped to ask them why they got a 1480 on their SATs and only have a 2.2 GPA in college, and often, I do. They know, but do not want to know, about being an underachiever. College is not what they were expecting, wanting, hoping for—what does this mean for what might happen after college? They worry that I know too much. It is discomfoting for them sometimes. They close up, stop talking, get a far away look in their eyes. They do not want to think past this week, this day, this meeting. Is silence the experience of failing as an advisor?

I meet the challenge of silence and downward stares head on. I ask them questions: What class have you liked the most since you started here? What class have you liked best in your major? Have you had any cool teachers? What do you

know now that you did not know when you started college? And, if it is going well: If you had it to do over again, what would you do? Sometimes, often, usually, the ice melts a little. The relationship is established, the foundation set.

Despite the somewhat one-way nature of the initial sharing between advisor and advisee, where advisor gives and advisee receives, the successful encounter often lays the foundation for potential additional sharing, for future encounters, for an ongoing relationship. The road becomes a more equal sharing between partners in the academic journey that relies on both the past and the future in order to negotiate and plan for the present. They become more comfortable with the things I know, and I become more comfortable with the things I do not know.

Huebner (1999) examines how knowledge provides power. I flirt with the power of being the “one who knows.” Sometimes I feel as if I might be an advising super-heroine racing to save the undergraduates from the impending doom of a denied graduation application. Kreisberg (1992) warns that many of our own experiences with schooling have taught us to see the world “through a lens of domination and have provided us with clear models of how to exert and respond to such exercises of power” (p. 201). I admit that I enjoy the feeling of the authority of being able to add and drop courses after the deadline, of declaring a grade inapplicable so it is removed from the GPA, of exempting a student from a science requirement. I feel the responsibility of being the decision-maker, the possessor of knowledge, the voice that grants and denies, accepts and declines, the ultimate authority.

“Authority,” from the 13th century Middle English *auctorite*, from Old French *auctorité*, from Latin *auctoritat-*, *auctoritas* asserts the power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behavior (www.m-w.com). In the academic advising arena, this should be extended. As Huebner suggests, “Knowledge as a form of power also corrupts. Knowledge has within it the power to enslave, to make one less free, rather than freer, unless the user is fully aware of the disadvantages” (1999, p. 37). The cape of the advising authority and its granted powers does certainly come with advantages and disadvantages.

I realize early in my tenure that with this assumed power my weakness is greatly exposed: I want to be liked. I want to be helpful. I want to exercise this power I have been bestowed with to help students, to “get around” rules that hinder them, rules that prevent them from taking a course for the third time or force them to take math before they earn a certain number of credits. I want to exert my authority to enable students to drop courses retroactively after the deadline, and even delete entire semesters if they have not done well. I want to protect students from being academically dismissed. I want to use my power so students can walk away from me feeling good about me and my advising, so *I* can feel good about me and my advising. I want students to come back to me the next time.

I do believe, and slowly confirm, that some students will say whatever they need to to get what they want. I also realize that for some students, school is their last priority as a brother commits suicide the day before Thanksgiving, a mother dies of liver cancer, a family declares bankruptcy or divorces or moves. “Do they even have any black people in Nebraska?” asks one African-American student whose family

moved to Lincoln from Pittsburgh three weeks before he was supposed to go home for Thanksgiving during his freshman year. I want to help, I want to fix, I want to ignore the rules, I want to make it better. I want to use my power to make it so. What might happen if I say “no”? What is the feeling of passing the buck on to my supervisor so I will not have to deal with someone’s anger? When is it okay for me to say “no” in this environment? When is it important for me to do so?

I slowly learn that sometimes saying “no” is the best way to help a student. Helping students to help themselves is an advisor’s greatest challenge, and also their greatest contribution. Allowing students to know they should take a semester off, that this large university setting is not right for them, that there are consequences for the actions of partying harder than they have studied are important realizations for both advisor and advisee. We both need to sit and plan how this academic house is being built, and must ensure that it will be inhabitable when it is complete.

Sitting Down With the Architect

. . . At key points in their college years, an academic advisor asked questions, or posed a challenge, that forced them to think about the relationship of their academic work to their personal lives. (Light, 2001, p. 88)

I glance over the list of names of the students and why they are coming to see me: a couple of students changing their major, two senior audits, one student studying abroad, several first year and transfer students who need advice on what classes to take next semester, three students on academic warning, one athlete who needs permission to change a class, and a student wanting to take an internship sponsored by the college. I get a glass of water, slowly open my yogurt, warm up my English muffin in the microwave, turn on my computer, and start to open the various

computer programs I will be using throughout the day. For a while, I did not open any of the students' folders prior to our meetings; I like to be surprised. No, actually I think I like to be open to what the student wants to share with me before I assert my role of authority into the relationship by telling them what they "need," and what they "don't have," and what they "should" do. Difficult words, "need" and "should," since they are based wholly on my opinion and experiences. What has authorized me to "do" anything, or to tell anyone else what they "need to" or "should" do? My name on the door? That I have a card that says "Senior Academic Advisor?" No student has ever asked me why I am qualified, about what experiences brought me to the place of making decisions about the academic choices of others.

How does one look at an academic advisor? What is my role, my place, in the planning of someone's future? What is the experience of creating a connection, however temporary? What is the reason for wanting to, needing to, make a contribution, a difference?

Advise, from the 14th century Middle French *aviser*, from *avis*, means to counsel, caution, warn, recommend (www.m-w.com). I do all of these things. I must anticipate every wrong course selection, suggest alternatives when courses are filled, warn about the "prerequisite" courses that allow a student to declare a major, or prevent it from happening. It is responsibility I am not expecting—I am not sure that my own path, the base for my advising "expertise," is the same one that my students can, or should, follow. Theirs is a different world, a world of computers and the Internet and rush, rush, rush. No time to search for, much less find, a love of learning in an unexpected field. They want easy professors, not interesting ones. What is easy?

What is the feeling of taking classes only to fill general education requirements?

What is the experience of passing time until the diploma is delivered? I prepare, counsel, suggest, encourage, discourage, propose, inform, support—often within the same conversation. I am prepared, counseled, suggested to, encouraged, discouraged, proposed to, informed, and supported—often within the same conversation. I do not just advise, I care.

I am care-full with the information that students will share with me, either knowingly or unknowingly. Sometimes I think I can tell more about students from what they do not tell me than what they do. Noddings and Shore (1984) warn against such intuition, cautioning that one must not confuse “the intuition itself with the certainty that accompanies it . . . what seems intuitively correct or obvious may, indeed, turn out to be wrong” (p. 53). Instead, they argue, caring is a difficult and delicate endeavor.

We see that, when we consider the action component of caring in depth, we shall have to look beyond observable action to acts of commitment, those acts that are seen only by the individual subject performing them. (Noddings, 1984, p. 10)

For me, this “act of commitment” has a tangible result. I have taken certain steps to try to help me remember students. I keep notes on every student that I meet. I am able to say to a student, “Well, when we met last April, you were thinking about studying abroad next spring. Are you still considering that?” They are amazed that I “remember” them. I am the only advisor in my office who does this. Some other advisors in my office suggest I am “so organized.” Really, it is my battle against my own guilt at not remembering students who tell me, “You were so helpful last time I

was here,” and they do not even look vaguely familiar to me that has resulted in over 200 pages of notes of student meetings. Noddings (1984) suggests:

The one-caring comes across to the cared-for in an attitude. Whatever she does, she conveys to the cared-for that she cares . . . She feels the excitement, pain, terror, or embarrassment of the other and commits herself to act accordingly. She is present to the cared-for. Her attitude is one of receptivity. But there is a receptivity required of the cared-for also. (p. 59)

It is a two-way street, advising and remembering students and being remembered by students who have been advised. I recall the first time I looked in a student’s folder who was already sitting in my office and I realized that I had seen him three times in two years and I did not remember him and he did not remember me. Am I still able to be effective with someone who non-remembers? If I am a non-rememberer? Noddings (1984) implores us to seek the involvement of the cared-for, tells us that the student is infinitely more important than the subject matter, that [the teacher’s] role is to influence. Perhaps this assists my discomfort with non-remembering—if every meeting is designed to influence, perhaps the remembering, the history, is not as present, not as necessary, in a care-full advising relationship? As Casey (1987) suggests, recognition gives “the feeling of immediate access” (p. 124). What if I miss that cue?

It is a daily and tangible worry, the feeling that I need to remember, and then to remember better. It is the recognition of the need to clear away the bumps in the dirt and the rocks that burden the mind. Now, I find that the simple act of checking the folders prior to meeting with a student and seeing if my initials are there already allows the way to smooth just a bit. It prepares for the building soon to come.

Laying the Foundation

Each day brings fresh ideas, fresh challenges, and fresh ways of seeing the world. The regularities, and surprises are what invite us to sustain a call. We live each day in risk, responsibility, and responsiveness. (Berman, 1994, p. 9)

It is sometimes hard to prepare ahead for advising conversations. I am never sure who will walk into my office or why. Even though they have told the main office why they are scheduling an appointment, once our meeting begins, it rarely is so focused and on task. Students want to know about financial aid, scholarships, where to go for counseling, what country they should study abroad in, whether or not I think they will be able to get a job with a Women's Studies degree, why the University does not provide housing to transfer students. They tell me about the death of their grandmother, their mother's breast cancer, about getting a concussion while playing basketball, about the fact that their economics teaching assistant cannot speak English, about breaking up with their boyfriend/girlfriend, and that their roommate's boyfriend basically has moved into their relatively small dorm room. It is these life realities that make the folders come to life, that create an exchange, an interaction, a "way of finding ourselves in a relation of being in the world" (Hultgren, 1991, p. 38). As the conversation evolves, the advising relationship is created.

What does it mean to have a conversation? Does it require two persons to engage with one another actively, or can one just take notes? Should the conversation lead forward, backward, both or neither? I am somewhat surprised to find that my advising conversations often go in reverse. The students come in for something specific, and then, based on what they present to me, we wander backward into conversation which allows for, well, more conversation. I connect with students here,

in these backward meanderings. I find that there is a tangible difference between a “talk” and a “conversation” for an academic advisor. If the advisor is able to move quickly through the talk and get to the conversation, the meeting seems to have more value, to come with more of a guarantee for future meetings. Will I recognize the opening when it occurs? What if I cannot create the shift, or do not move to it quickly enough and then the appointment is over?

I often worry that I might make a wrong turn while I am advising and not be able to fulfill my part of the bargain. A lot of students come for advising because they “have to,” but others really are looking for answers. As the old maxim goes, “What you do speaks so loudly I can’t hear what you say.” I meet students who are irritated, disenchanted, angry, hostile. They walk in the door, annoyed they cannot register since they have a mandatory block, or they need permission to drop more than one class in a semester, or they need special stamps to take courses since they have below a 2.0 grade point average. I am the horrible, disappointing, frustrating reality—the academic advisor in a large state school, the metaphoric building inspector ensuring that the building blocks are stamped and approved for use. They do not want to take the steps to address the “problem” that is their academic experience; they do not care if the structure is solid, only that it is done quickly. I am equipped to help them deal with the academic “problem” and am well versed in referring them to people who can help them address the “problems” in their personal lives, their financial lives, their lives as they currently stand. Often they do not want help. Sometimes they do.

In establishing the grounding for my advising relationship, I deliberately transform from academic advisor into mentor, from the Greek *MentOr*, a friend of

Odysseus entrusted with the education of Odysseus' son, Telemachus (Barnhart, 1995). Advisors, too, are entrusted with the education of sons and daughters. Ultimately, Barnhart (1995) discovers, a mentor is someone who has "intent, purpose, spirit, passion" (p. 470). I try to become a trusted advice-giver, planner, and guide through the maze of college life and early adulthood. Zachary (2000), in examining the criteria that contribute to a successful mentoring relationship, identifies effective communication, providing encouragement, facilitating a hospitable environment, goal setting, guiding, managing conflict, problem solving, providing and receiving feedback, and reflecting on growth and development. She also discusses the nature of the "learning centered partnership."

It is human nature to project our own experiences and reality onto someone else. We naturally make assumptions about others and their experiences. Sometimes, with relatively little information, we fill in the blanks. Mentors need to guard against this temptation and be aware of what sets the mentor's journey apart from the mentee's journey. (Zachary, 2000, p. 12)

However, I am aware that this journey is not my own, and often tell students, "I already have my degree. This one is yours." Then I smile, to remove the potential sting for those who want to be "told" instead of advised.

Still, it is a real challenge to remember to ask instead of tell. I sometimes forget that some experiences cannot be substituted. It reminds me of my dad telling my brothers and me, "Believe me, everything you're doing, I have already done" when we were kids about to make a big mistake. Somehow, we were still bound and determined to make the mistake. Fortunately, my dad was always there at the other end, and rarely with an "I told you so." It is a good lesson that I apply daily. Sometimes students need to flunk out of school, be told to go elsewhere, before they

“get it.” No amount of stories, no number of warnings or threats or suggestions will prevent that which is inevitable. The “I told you so” does not change the academic reality of being dismissed. It is a lesson learned slowly for some, and, sadly, not at all for others until it is too late. There are rarely effective shortcuts in creating a solid foundation.

With some students, I practice “What are you going to do about that?” instead of “So, you need to set up a meeting with your professor as soon as possible.” It is true that students need to meet with their professors, but it is much better if they can recognize that on their own and I can reinforce it as a good step in the process of academic success. The transformation from “he won’t,” “she didn’t,” “they can’t” to “I can,” “I will,” “I did” is essential. The problem-solving undergraduate students experience has a relatively steep learning curve sometimes. Students are introduced to a new way of thinking, of learning, of experiencing life. They are sometimes forced into uncomfortable and unwanted academic experiences since students here are required to fulfill academic requirements in addition to courses in their field of study.

The dialogue established surrounding these expectations in academic advising is similar to every other structured environment. Advisors have various codes we adopt and subsequently speak in and sometimes forget that students may not be clued in to the lexicon. We do not provide a verbal blueprint, and confusion can sometimes result. “What is the difference between CORE and USP?” “What’s the HA again?” “What’s the dual advising system?” Gadamer addresses this tendency:

A person who speaks—who, that is to say, uses the general meanings of words—is so oriented toward the particularity of what he is perceiving that everything he says acquires a share in the particularity of the circumstances he is considering . . . However, certainly speaking implies using pre-established

words with general meanings, at the same time, a constant process of concept formation is going on, by means of which the life of a language develops. (Gadamer, 1975/2000, pp. 428-9)

There is the recognized need to slow down, answer basic questions, move away from the monotony of the advising form that I see twenty times a day and students see twice in four years. I learn to speak in interpretive code, explaining while I read their form upside down so they can see it right side up, making eye contact, pausing. Often, this works, and the house begins to resemble what it must, which is, of course, different for every student who comes into my office.

The coming together of the elements of advising, the input and output, the internal and external, the power and helplessness, the dialogue and silence, the unasked and unanswered, the person who speaks and the person who listens all assist in laying the foundation for academic advising. The need to know, the ability to ask, and the patience to explore engage the advisor in the personal process of seeking and sharing knowledge. Once considered, such elements allow for continued outreach, continued growth, continued conversation, as the students bring forth their own individual needs, goals, and expectations for what advising “is” and “should be,” and the advisor’s ability to anticipate those needs and expectations become critical as we inhabit our space we have built.

Meeting the Neighbors

There are many other people who exist within the structure academic advisors build for themselves who also have an interest in working with and creating relationships with students. The teaching faculty, career and personal counselors, student affairs professionals, and even other academic advisors all interact within the

academic house in which the students dwell. It is intriguing to consider the interactions between the units as we all come together to assist the student toward graduation.

What happens when those interests conflict? Does the student feel a greater connection to the department they are a part of, more of a connection to people who have more specific answers than I might? How do the “professionals” serving college students view each other? In my college we have set up a carefully designed system of non-interference, so I do my part and the individual departments do their part. There is little chance for conflict if the responsibilities don’t overlap. Sometimes, however, someone oversteps their bounds, and we are quick to call one another to reestablish the boundaries that define what we each “do” for students. I do not advise students about history department requirements and they do not advise students about the lab science or foreign language requirements.

What is the experience of professional jealousy? Of professional superiority? Do I really feel better about myself when a student tells me that I am “so much better” than their departmental advisor or their former college advisor from elsewhere on campus? At what point might the experience of academic advising become a competition about who is the most liked? What makes one advisor “so much better” than another? What makes an advisor “the worst?” Do they challenge too much? Do they give inaccurate or incomplete information? Do they rush through the appointment in order to get to the next one? I wonder what kind, if any, feedback to give when I hear complaints about other advisors. It is a sensitive subject, criticism from students. I usually ignore the comparison when such statements are made by

students. I am really not sure what to say about the “bad neighbors” in academic advising. I try to refer students to good neighbors, the advisors I know that I have heard good things about or know personally. I try not to think about the times when I might have been a “bad neighbor” during an advising session, but recognize that the complaints between neighbors can definitely go both ways.

Starting to Build: Creating “Safe Space”

What is near us is within our reach, or what dancers call “reach space.” . . . To be within actual reach is to occupy a location so nearby that I do not have to move, or move much, to attain it. The criterion for such nearness is less that of distance than advertability. (Casey, 1993, p. 59)

This dream house may be merely a dream of ownership, the embodiment of everything that is considered convenient, comfortable, healthy, sound, desirable, by other people. It must therefore satisfy both pride and reason, two irreconcilable terms. (Bachelard, 1964/1994, p. 61)

I recognize from the number of students who come to make an appointment with a “counselor” that most of them are looking for more than a straightforward academic advising appointment. They are searching for more than what classes to take, which professors are easy, and which classes are still open that do not start at 8 a.m. “Counseling,” taken from the 14th century Latin, meaning to avoid rash actions, allows me to open up conversations upon which “advising” sets limits. Counseling allows me to reach beyond the boundaries of my title of “Senior Academic Advisor” and expose motivations, rationale, to explore a different way of being, reason for being, in the world. My way of being has been shaped through my contact with others. I rely greatly on the input, insight, and effort of others to come to an understanding of me and my life experiences. Yet, I am aware that I am not trained as a counselor, just to counsel.

Daloz Parks (2000) argues that we learn in the context of relationships—in relationship to texts, people, and institutions. “We learn because we dwell in the dynamic interconnectedness of all life . . . the power of the relation of self and other” (p. 73). Subsequently, my goal is to design my advising appointments to help me establish a personal connection, the basis for a potential ongoing relationship, with my students. “Counseling” allows me the opportunity to create that tangible connection. It allows the relationship a way to evolve so “rash actions” might be avoided, altered, dismissed, digested, acted upon. The students sometimes are startled by the interest—at such a large university few take the time to know students beyond their student identification numbers.

Sometimes the attention, the person behind the “person-al” connection is unwanted, unwelcome, unqualified to solve, fix, un-do. I learned years ago that it is okay to say “I don’t know,” but I was usually able to find out the answer. Some of the problems are far beyond the reach of my basic counseling skills, far beyond the walls of academia. What is the feeling of being helpless to help? Can I help if I am helpless? What is the experience of being help-less while trying to be help-full?

Most of the students who arrive for appointments are required to be there. They need an audit; they are on academic warning; they are new freshmen or first semester transfer students. They wait in the impersonal lobby area with the loud and outdated posters, the fake plant, too-sweet air freshener, old newspapers, and numerous flyers on colored paper announcing career fairs, internship opportunities, and study abroad locations. They sit and wait to be seen. It is not a welcoming foyer for the students to begin creating their academic homes.

Once I call them in to see me, they come into my office and sit down in the chair next to my desk. Some of them visibly relax, glad to finally be able to meet with someone. Some of them cringe, noticeably stiffen, gearing up for a fight about a course they did not sign up for that they need for graduation, or to argue about the math or foreign language requirement. Others simply sit, *tabula rasa*, a blank slate waiting to receive information. All we share at that moment is space.

My goal is to create safe space for them, a place where they might feel comfortable, understood, listened to, heard. I have found that in this space. It is space which creates that in me—a place I worked to create and which is reflective, reflexive, of my own needs, goals, expectations. I have thought-fully created a home for my advising, which welcomes and informs, encourages and relaxes those who enter.

Students visiting my office for the first time are curious about the pictures my little cousins drew for me: the mermaid from Zach, the angels from Emmy, the rainbows from Lily, and the cookie monster coloring book picture from Maggie. They read my comic strips, study my Monet and Chagall posters, and comment occasionally on the mango-scented potpourri on the table. They ask if I ever take naps on my couch, and laugh when I tell them that is why there are a blanket and a pillow there . . . I enjoy my office.

When students say “I really like your office,” I respond, “Not a bad place to go for eight hours a day if you have to be somewhere.” I have created my house away from home. My office, my space, my place, is made for me. It is a sanctuary, my second den, an extension of my permanent dwelling place many miles away. I choose

things to share my work space that make me happy—reminders of trips I took, or a student I worked with, or the option to take a nap in the middle of the afternoon. My office gives me permission to study and evaluate and encounter my inner self; the bright colors, the peaceful pictures, the smells of potpourri and fresh flowers and a rescued ficus tree, my favorite snacks in my desk drawer. I anticipate my daily encounters with the world within these four walls, and welcome others to join me.

Right outside the door there is a nametag reading “Paula F. Nadler.” It is named space, a marked place for me to spend my days. I love to look out the big window at the tree with tangled limbs early in the morning and as the sun begins to set, a place for squirrels to play and birds to rest. I love being able to watch the sky pale toward the evening as the clouds drift wearily toward their new destination, carrying the hopes and dreams of thousands of students on this campus as they strive toward graduation. I love watching the clouds roll in as the sky prepares for a storm. I love watching people walking across the mall, or playing Frisbee through it, or lying down and taking a nap on it. I love my office. I am at home there.

What contributes to the making of “safe space?” Does the person create the space or does the space create the person? With different space is a different place created? My safe space gives permission for others to relax, open up, encounter new views and ideas. My safe space gives me permission to trust my judgment. . . I have earned this office, this job, the trust of these students. It is within these four walls that I gain confidence at the same time I earn it. It allows my place to be entered and revealed. Why do I think it is so important to define space? When did it become important to me to be validated by the space with which I surround myself? How

does one face an encounter in a self-revealing place/space with a stranger? What is the experience of defining one's self through space?

“Defining a Place of My Own”

I walk into where I have come to be myself.
I sit, and wonder what my world shows to those around me.
Do they see the recently descended peace and contentment that comes with
understanding what and where and who you are supposed to be, wanting to be,
needing to be?
Or the playfulness of the stuffed beanbag animals and colored slinky,
Or the budding nature photographer with an awe of nature's splendor,
Or perhaps, for those most insightful, all of those things?

I walk into where I have come to be myself.
My home for eight or nine hours every day,
a place with the chair I bought for myself.
The chair which houses and shelters, and swings and goes up and down,
Eerily reflecting the moods of the students I encounter on a daily basis.

I walk into where I have come to be myself.
I look at the things that make it home. I interact, define, create, reflect.
I live, breathe, smell, enjoy this space, this place that is mine.

I walk into where I have come to be myself.
I know that others feel it, live it, see it, understand it, need it, want it too when they
experience it.
They, too, want such a place. A place that reflects joy and happiness and peace and
contentment and confidence and appreciation and understanding at last.
A place that invites sharing, reflection, peace.

I walk into where I have come to be myself.
I look at the pictures on the wall, the brightness of the room that others before me
have rejected as too light, too musty, too noisy. . .
But for me it is perfect: A place where I have come to be myself. (Nadler, Fall, 2000)

Casey (1993) asserts that “Objects reflect or solicit bodily action in the present . . . the here and the there, the near and the far, are the most pervasive parameters of place” (pp. 47, 63). In the creation of my own space what am I *not* place-ing in it? What things are absent in comfort-able space? My space places me for

the students who encounter me, allowing, even encouraging them to find some way to identify; it gives them some way to place themselves in their own space within mine.

Subdividing Safe Space

When we cannot find an inhabitable place, we must set about *making* or *building* such a place to ensure stable inhabitation. The place made, a “built place,” occurs in a distinctly limited sphere of space. We gain thereby not just a measure of security but a basis for dwelling *somewhere in particular*. (Casey, 1994, p. 109)

We are responsible for creating social spaces in which the voices of truth can be heard; we are responsible for opening up social spaces in which the truth can be spoken: spoken and not shouted, spoken without fear of punishment or reprisal, spoken without shame. (Levin, 1989, p. 137)

I treasure my office—the actual physical environment in which I find myself.

This is an office where people are meant to be comfortable, a comfortable place to come every day to greet the world, a place where students are able to learn and discuss and confess and be. Routinely I leave my space in their hands. I go to make copies, to get a form, to get a printout of their schedule. They are able to encounter my space without me. When I am not there, I want them to feel, to experience, to learn, to know, to be.

What is the experience of “designing” safe places? In what ways do such designs communicate? Are they intentional? Deliberate? What can be learned from the safe space of another? How does space communicate?

Students who come to see me regularly play with my rainbow-colored slinky. They reminisce about their childhood slinkys that used to go all the way down the basement stairs. They pick up my beanbag frog and lizard to play with and hold, my turtle candle, the Egyptian camel with the parasol, and sometimes, when I leave them alone in my office, I think they talk to them. This is an office where they are greeted

by the odd-looking ceramic lamp, a white face with hair made of painted lemons and turnips and leaves—a gift from a former student, by several candles given to me over the last few years by coworkers, by little plaques and a Maryland teddy bear, also gifts from students. They ask about the mug and numerous pictures of two bichon frises: “Faith and Hope,” I say to them proudly. I will sometimes show them my “Furry Child” photo album. We are instant compatriots as we share their official advising appointment time talking about the nonstop antics of dogs and cats instead of clearing their blocks. The blocks are easily addressed; time spent sharing stories about pets back home does not present itself so easily for many of them these days.

They look at the pictures strewn all around that I have taken of Brandywine Falls, Glacier National Park, Crater Lake, the Grand Canyon, and the Grand Tetons, and the posters of Yosemite National Park and Lake Moraine and the blanket from Mexico. For some, the items help them transport themselves away from the environs of the university, and final exams, and academic degree requirements. Those who have been, truly understand. “You must be a western girl,” they say, feeling a kinship with a stranger almost immediately. They express surprise to know I was raised locally, but ultimately, they know that I know—such sacred places exist and are appreciated. For those who have not been, and experience such space through a 4 x 6 inch frame, and wonder at the beauty that cannot be found here in suburbia, it provides good conversation. “Where is that?” they ask in awe, and I tell them. For most, these are barely places on a map. Their world expands a little bit, sitting there looking, sharing someone else’s safe space.

Such sharing, unspoken though it often is, creates an important transition. This is not an impersonal office with books and file folders. It is an office of color, of brightness, of the faint scent of potpourri. It is calming, distracting from the task at hand, a conversation starter. It allows a comfortable way to begin the unpacking, with some students carrying along much more in their baggage than others.

Unpacking the Boxes

Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding . . . thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other.
(Gadamer, 1975/2000, p. 385)

Call requires that we take responsibility for using the building blocks given to us . . . our innate faculties are guided by knowledge and embedded in our sense of caring for our fellow travelers. The initial call may make us feel anxious—even anguished—vulnerable, and at risk. But a sense of call is invitational to probing into the knowledge bases of the community or professional arena. (Lashley et al., 1994, p. 8)

Ever since I can remember, people seem to tell me things. I am very good “one-on-one.” I enjoy lunches with only one or two people, since if it is more than that I feel like I have not really been able to catch up with everyone. I like to hear what is going on with people, what they are doing, thinking about, planning, experiencing. I have always been exceptionally good at keeping in touch with friends all over the country. However, it has been only recently that I feel comfortable with telling things back, that I have come to a place where I feel that what I have to say is worth sharing, that people want to know what I am doing, how I am doing, where I am going and why.

In advising, it is a good relationship for me since I often am able to share stories and experiences that invite students to share their own. I am, however, very careful about crossing “the line.” I share little things about myself: I am a proud dog

owner, I like a certain movie or television show, I have been to a certain city (or am planning to go there soon), I am the only one in my family besides my mother to complete a college degree, that I was not the most focused student in high school or college and I still managed to complete two Master's degrees and much of a Ph.D., I love the spinach and artichoke dip at Cornerstone Bar and Grill.

There is a thin line between sharing and sharing too much. Students come to me for professional help, not for friendship. I wonder if one conversation I had with a student (who drops by regularly, often several times a month) about religion was too personal. He has asked me about my observance of the religion, that I am willing to work on certain holidays, drive on Shabbat. "I consider myself just as Jewish as you are," I tell him. He is an Orthodox Jew. "I am just not as observant." "What's the difference?" he asks. "How you feel spiritually. How you connect to God," I respond. He looks troubled, befuddled. Have I gone too far, I wonder? In his world women do not encounter God and religion in this way—is this conversation too far beyond my role as academic advisor? It is here that advisor, counselor, and mentor intermix, clash, struggle against and amongst one another as student and advisor search to make sense of the relationship, to remove and reestablish un-agreed upon, never discussed boundaries.

It is easy, tempting even, to be so taken in by what I am feeling that I forget what I am there to be doing. Often, students will tell me I am nice, helpful, funny, encouraging—that I have made a difference. I feel validated that what I have to say is helpful, and that my perspectives matter. I want to shout "Yes! I made a difference for another student!" "That's my job," I respond instead with a smile, careful again of

the delineation between the personal and the professional engagement. I am supposed to be, paid to be, helpful. I struggle with simply saying “Thank you.” It might imply that I know I am helpful, that I presume I am helpful, that of course I am helpful. Why don’t I want students to know how much it matters to me to make a difference? Would that empower them in some way? Would it somehow dis-empower me? If I frame it as being part of my job, it might happen by accident—I am more comfortable with that possibility. It allows the failures to not sting as much.

I am not always successful, but it is becoming easier to let some students go, to recognize that I am not all things to all students. I sincerely hope they will find an advisor who can fulfill their needs and expectations better for their advising experience. I hold all students accountable, and not all of them are ready for that.

Levin (1989) explains:

We are called into questioning by our listening; we are tested by what we hear; we can be accused by what we do not hear. There are ways in which we are responsible to others, responsible to humanity, for the character of our responsiveness as beings capable of listening and hearing. . . . Listening is a question of character. . . . It is a moral struggle to *become* someone who can always listen and hear the truth—to become a person who *seeks* the truth, who *values* the truth more than ease, more than gain. It sometimes requires enormous energy to listen and hear the truth. (p. 137)

How is it possible that they cannot understand so much about so little? Are they hearing anything at Orientation? Are they listening during advising sessions that are required over the years? Then how can they possibly not know, not understand? I think about my own academic experiences with advising. Basically, I had little advising in college. I remember meeting with someone the November of my senior year to make sure I was eligible to graduate, and that was it. I remember meeting with Diane Something-or-Other to declare a major in history as a sophomore. Mostly I

advised myself. What brings these students to my office in desperate shape one semester before, or often even the semester of, graduation? Why are they unable to understand the CORE science requirement? Did they bother to read the CORE guide? I think it is pretty clear. My undergraduate university was twice the size of this one and I managed to negotiate similar requirements. Why do students come in here and complain that they did not know about the foreign language requirement two weeks before they are supposed to graduate? Did I ever not understand a requirement? Who did I go to? I remember I found a professor to mentor me through my history classes, which mostly meant I took as many classes with him as I could, and took three independent studies with professors I liked as a senior to study material I found interesting.

I work hard to listen and not judge. Judging cannot help, will not help, will only alienate and frustrate. Listen first, then respond. As Neal (1994) says, “The creative process by which the student discovers self, makes meaning, establishes authentic relationships, makes self vulnerable, and learns to care for self and others responsibly is uniquely different” (p. 133). Being open to such an awakening is critical to successful advising.

Listening to students may be the single most important aspect of the advising experience. The ability to not anticipate what students will say, even though their situation virtually mirrors 27 others from this week, is an ongoing challenge. Burley-Allen (1982) explains that “When we think about listening, we tend to assume it is basically the same as hearing; this is a dangerous misconception because it leads us to believe effective listening is instinctive” (p. 2). Nichols (1995) continues, “Not only

is listening an active process; it often takes a deliberate effort to suspend our own needs and reactions. . .genuine listening involves a brief suspension of self” (pp. 62-3).

This is the forgotten skill for academic advising. The ability to suspend disbelief as students explain why they failed a class, why they need an exception to policy, is balanced quickly when a student shares she was sexually assaulted, someone is struggling with coming out of the closet, and another has been battling with depression.

What is the experience of, as Nichols (1995) explains it, “suspending the self?” It does not mean “losing the self,” but simply “Suspending your own agenda, forgetting about what you might say next, and concentrating on being a receptive vehicle for the other person” (p. 67). Without this ability, the creation of the academic house ceases—no one can hear what the other is saying, or meaning, or needing, or wanting.

Unsettling the Dust

Not only the quality of individual young adult lives but also our future as a culture depends in no small measure upon our capacity to recognize the emerging competence of young adults, to initiate them into big questions, and to give them access to worthy dreams. (Daloz Parks, 2000, p. xi)

Perception may be the first form of self-awareness, but it is by no means the only one. . .Because it is based on memory and reconstructions, the self remembered does not have the same claim to accuracy as the self perceived. Often the way we remember things is not the way they really were. (Neisser, 1993, pp. 4-5)

What is the experience of remembering and revisiting? After more than fifteen years, are my memories of my own college days skewed by my graduate school experiences? What is the experience of not really knowing what is remembered?

What can an advisor know from experience if the experience was not shared?

Casey (1987) explains that remembering is a mental act. He argues that “We can, and frequently do, remember single things in isolation from other things and events” (p. 52). Perhaps this is why college is difficult for some students. They do not remember any singular success in academics. They were not taught to remember academic achievement; they must learn to construct it for themselves. Not all feel they are up to this task. This is the duty of the advisor, then, to reconstruct, to redefine, to reconfigure the academic memory.

What is the experience of wishing to be anywhere but here? Many of my students end up in the College of Arts and Humanities after flunking out of business, engineering, government, computer science or pre-med. Coming for a change of major appointment often means admitting defeat, facing up to the fact that they may disappoint themselves, their parents, or perhaps they do not live up to the accomplishments of their siblings. What is the feeling of being forced to face a failure? Sometimes the baggage being carried into the advising session is heavy, and loaded down with the weight of collapse. Sometimes the baggage is as light as air, as students find relief in the failure, finally free of the weight of the expectations of others.

How does one experience a showdown with parents who are paying for college and students who want to major in English or women’s studies? What is it like to be defensive about your choice of a major? What if your parents are right and you won’t find a job with a degree in history? What is the daily, the hourly,

experience of advising, of counseling students for whom these issues are a daily reality and a battleground during the holidays?

Such encounters ask a lot of the advisor. Can I possibly anticipate all questions, be ready with all answers, know what the student should do after college, before grad school, during next summer and this winter vacation? Additionally, I need to hear, to listen, to prepare, and to encourage, too. What is the responsibility of doing academic advising? “Responsible,” from 1643, means you are liable to be called on to answer, liable to be called to account as the primary cause, motive, or agent being the cause or explanation, liable to legal review or in case of fault to penalties, and able to answer for one's conduct and obligations (www.m-w.com). What happened to people taking responsibility for their own actions, their own decisions? How do students make decisions if I cannot offer an answer, if I *do* not offer an answer? Is experience overrated?

These conversations sometimes do not feel very “safe,” but they are necessary. They allow me and the student to negotiate new territory, build toward new understandings and provide a basis for goal-setting and, more importantly, mutual understanding.

Un-covering the Furniture

Most of the time, we are just passing information along, not too caught up in things, not dwelling in the significance of events, but living in the vague average understanding of everydayness. In these experiences, I am no different than the others, I am simply experiencing as they do, as one does. (Moran, 2000, p. 239)

What is the feeling of not knowing? What is the feeling of coming to know, of understanding experience? Can one come to be in anonymity? In what way(s?) is it

important to be known by another?

It is my biggest fear that I will not, do not, have not recognized a student. They all blend together—one big mass of jeans and sweatshirts and hair and baseball caps. Yet, there is a connection there, a bond that we create, define, and explore together, over the course of experience and expectation.

What is it like to fail to remember? What does it feel like to not be remembered? It seems that failing to remember would be a rather permanent flaw in a definably tenuous connection, but it is not necessarily the case that trust is attached to memory. If a student shares something personal with me and I fail to remember them the next time they return, it is not guaranteed that the relationship can easily be repaired. What creates the advising relationship, like most other interpersonal interactions, seems not to be solely past experience, but also the present. But sometimes, I simply can't remember, I can't re-collect the information that has been shared, so, many times I "fake it." "Hi!" I say enthusiastically with a smile. The student does look vaguely familiar. They seem to know their way around my space, this place. We sit down, I inflect my "what can I do for you today" so that it is appropriate for either a person I know or not. What is the memory's experience of failing? Why does admitting that I cannot remember feel like failing? Is that an expectation? If I cannot remember, have I failed in my role as academic advisor? What is the lived experience of failing? What, for an academic advisor, is failure?

Failure, from the Old French *faillir*, dating from 1643, reflects to the inability to perform a normal function, to be deficient, a deterioration or decay (www.m-w.com). I can almost feel the process working as I forget, as I remember wrongly, as I

am unable to retain names, dates, places, stories, problems, concerns.

Stern (1993, in Neisser) explains that:

No one will dispute that feelings of being “attached,” “isolated,” “alone,” “loved,” and so on are uniquely interpersonal and that they arise in the course of coordinated interactions—even though the feelings can continue after the interaction is over, when alone, in memory, and so forth as can any other kind of affect experience. (p. 211)

In six years I have seen more than 8,000 different students. It is impossible to remember them all. I find myself desperately wishing for a rush of Esmereldas, Gwendolyns, and Walters. I cannot remember all of the Matts, Brians, and Jennifers. What is the experience of feeling that you should be able to accomplish the impossible? I try to check their folders before they come in to meet with me during walk-in hours. If I see my handwriting in the folder, I know they have seen me before. What if I have forgotten something important from our last meeting? How do I learn how to recall what a student has left with me from a previous meeting? Stories, problems, situations are often gifts that students share with me, and, as with gifts from friends, it is sometimes important to run around and put the gifts out when you are expecting them as company.

Is this feeling of urgency to remember a realistic expectation for academic advising? Do the students really expect that the advisors remember everything they talked about the last time they were there? I believe they often do. They feel a connection to me, have requested and scheduled an appointment with me. We talked about personal things the last time they were there, and it seems they do want, and expect, to be remembered. But what role do they have in the relationship? How can a one way relationship by definition create a two-sided responsibility?

What is it about doing academic advising that so calls out to me, that enables me to love my daily experience despite the fear of failing to remember? Where does the “connection” reside that encourages me to renew the conversation over and over again? It is, ultimately, the ability to embrace those I can, let go of those I can’t, and be who I am best at being, that engages me in a coming into my own “be-ing” of me. Allowing myself the time, and space, and place to come into my own understanding of the advising process and my role within it, ultimately creates the lived experience within which is the home where I dwell.

The ability to use phenomenology as a method of inquiry allows me to use stories and my experiences to make meaning of my role, and invite meaning-making from others who share my title of academic advisor. Through the use of phenomenology, I am able to explore the experience of academic advising through stories of experiences and dialogues about understandings to find out what is known, and what is needed. What is the meaning of my profession? What is the lived experience that emerges through the process of doing academic advising?

A Phenomenological Foundation: Laying Van Manen’s Bricks

“Phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld—the world as we immediately experience it,” explains van Manen (2003, p. 9). Such exploration of the “lifeworld” becomes available through van Manen’s methodological structure. While Chapter Three explores this structure in great depth, the components do help to form the foundation upon which Chapters One and Two are based.

Van Manen (2003) explains that hermeneutic phenomenological research is a circular endeavor, and can be seen as:

A dynamic interplay among six research activities: (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world; (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it; (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon; (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting; (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30-1)

By using the methodology to examine a lifeworld, defined as the four inextricable existentials he identifies as illuminating a phenomenon (spatiality—felt space, corporeality—always being bodily present in the world, temporality—subjective time, and relationality—relationships maintained with others in interpersonal space), van Manen (2003) explains that we can “reflect on our pedagogic life in order to perceive an immediate, immense richness of meaning” (p 105). It is “to the extent that *my* experiences could be *our* experiences that the phenomenologist wants to be reflectively aware of certain experiential meanings,” (van Manen, 2003, p. 57).

Focusing on what a particular experience is “like,” and attempting to gain access to insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world “pre-reflectively,” van Manen asserts that phenomenology offers the possibility of “plausible insights that bring us into more direct contact with the world” (van Manen, 2003, p. 9). Such contact and interaction is at the heart of the experience of academic advising, and as a researcher, my intent is to understand what it is like to engage in those experiences and understandings. A significant amount of academic research has already focused on the experience of the student in academic advising, as well as

various approaches to academic advising, but no scholarship has been focused on the experience of the advisor actually engaging in academic advising.

In this first chapter, I began an investigation of my own experiences as I have been drawn to the phenomenon of doing academic advising. It reflects my inner- and under-standings and reflections about the nature of academic advising through the lens of the advisor. In Chapter Two, I continue the exploration of the phenomenon of the experience of academic advising, exploring themes that have emerged in my consideration of these initial engagements, as well as mining the literature that already exists on the goals and needs of academic advising and advisors. In Chapter Three, I ground my study through the philosophical discussions of Heidegger, Gadamer, Casey, Levin, Gendlin, Sardello, Lawlor, and others through the insights of van Manen's structure for phenomenological inquiry. Chapter Four examines the themes derived from conversations with other academic advisors, illuminating the understandings that are both common and unique to those sharing the role. In Chapter Five, the insights that emerge from these conversations are examined in light of the current pedagogical practices within academic affairs and student affairs units at large public universities. Finally, a consideration of the implications from the themes revealed within the context of larger university ambitions for student well-being further cements the building blocks, the "home" which is ultimately built through, and by, the academic advisor.

CHAPTER TWO: EXPLORING THE PHENOMENON OF ACADEMIC ADVISING: BUILDING A HOUSE OF EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE

A good description that constitutes the essence of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way . . . metaphor is not simply the bottomless ground, the empty core, the final destination of language. By way of metaphor, language can take us beyond the content of the metaphor toward the original region where language speaks through silence. This path of the metaphor is the speaking of thinking, of poetizing. (van Manen, 2003, pp. 39, 49)

. . . If I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace. Thought and experience are not the only things that sanction human values. (Bachelard, 1964/1994, p. 6)

In what way is the experience of doing academic advising brought forward by the metaphor of building a house? “Like everything else, a home starts out as an idea in the mind—a dream, much more than wood and glass and stone. Realization of that dream requires time, patience, and knowledge. . .” (Kirkpatrick, 1958, p. v). Houses are meant to be solid structures, providing safety, security, confidence, as well as an investment, a path to greater success. Building a house, be-coming a home-owner, opens doors that may not be open otherwise. There is a certain creative sharing, a certain understanding surrounding building, designing and decorating a house. In academic advising, the academic structure, the educational house being built, that often starts off with much angst and complexity due to all the choices and the options too numerous to count, slowly settles into a feeling of comfort, a feeling of security, and feelings of ownership and pride. It is the very nature of that structure that enables academic advisors to seek and create the feelings of home, connection, grounded-

ness, and, in return, to establish the relationships that are the foundations of their own advising experiences.

Most of the houses we see every day are certainly adequate. They're built with competence according to the building code, they keep out the weather, they're perfectly nice—but no more. Other houses, far fewer in number, have a more powerful impact. They go beyond competence and are satisfying in deeper ways—aesthetically, emotionally, intellectually, perhaps even spiritually. Such houses not only offer protection from the extremes of winter and summer, but also facilitate the enjoyment of nature's elements. While containing the required number and size of spaces, they are also organized to improve the quality of social life together and private hours apart. These “good houses” have the capacity to awaken the senses, memories and minds of their occupants, and inspire productive energies. (Jacobson, Silverstein, & Winslow, 1990, p. 3)

In what ways do academic advisors enable the creation of the metaphoric building of “good houses?” What encourages us to explore our own capacities to “awaken the senses, memories, and minds” of our students? In what ways are mutual buildings created, enhanced, and encouraged? Heidegger (1971/2001) explains:

Today's houses may be well planned, easy to keep, attractively cheap, open to air, light, and sun, but—do the houses in themselves hold any guarantee that dwelling occurs in them? . . . Dwelling and building are related as end and means . . . to build is in itself already to dwell. (p. 144)

Dwell, from Old English *dwellan*, to go astray, has come to mean “to remain for a time” (www.m-w.com). Certainly, the academic structure that houses college students has come to involve the experience of “[remaining] for a time,” and is dependent on the academic advisor to keep students from “going astray.” The experience of today's college students has moved, whole-istically, beyond classes. Like students of the past several decades, today's college student receives not only an academic education, but also an education in life planning, in decision making, in confronting adversity, and in recognizing personal strength and weakness. However,

there seem to be different pressures on today's students that stem from a quickly changing world, both technological and sociological. Students today seem smarter, but less mature. They appear to know more, but experience less. Their world offers more information, but they access less of it. They know how to memorize, but not always how to learn. For today's college students, developing the ability to dwell within their academic experience and to reflect upon their surroundings often rests squarely with the academic advisor.

However, it is important to recognize that not all "dwelling" that takes place is a positive dwelling. As Kirkpatrick (1958) reminds us, "One cannot hope that property will retain its value forever. All properties decline eventually," and he encourages us to be wary of a "zone in transition" (p. 10). It is inevitable that students will fail classes or drop out of school, and that advisors will burn out and not feel connected to the experience of doing advising any longer. Some of these advisors will move on to find new jobs, but others will turn inward, into that which is known and comfortable for themselves, but will not reach out toward their students and other advisors. As Edelwich (1980) suggests, "Although the helping relationship focuses on the needs of the person to whom help is given, the needs of the helper come into play as well" (p. 47). It is important to recognize that seeing students on an "assembly-line basis" with no expectation of increased pay and no real avenue for promotion can challenge even the most dedicated advisors.

Thus, the experiences of academic advising and the understanding and interpretation of those experiences by the academic advisor allow for a phenomenological turning to the metaphor of building a house, providing advisors the

ability to become building inspectors, architects, bricklayers, and interior decorators who ultimately help in the construction of the students' individual academic journeys through college. At the same time, the experience of doing academic advising also contributes to an advisor's own sense of home. The design and creation of our own physical space and our place within the academic dwelling as we try to create a home-base for the students, a place we can feel at home, is central to the lived experience of doing academic advising.

As Buechner (1996) explains:

What the word *home* brings to mind before anything else, I believe, is a place, and in its fullest sense not just the place where you happen to be living at the time but a very special place with very special attributes which make it clearly distinguishable from all other places. The word *home* summons up a place—more specifically a house within that place—where you have rich and complex feelings about, a place where you feel or did feel once, uniquely *at home*, which is to say a place where you feel that all is somehow ultimately well even if things aren't going all that well at any given moment. (p. 63)

This chapter explores the meaning of academic advising through the metaphorical lens of building a house. Lived accounts of academic advisors from preliminary conversations are used to help explore the phenomenon, as well as other sources.

Choosing the New Address: Defining One's "Place" in Building

A home for the soul is not a material goal to be acquired, but a setting for inquiring into the processes of living. Within its walls we can discover how the germ of consciousness within us grows to become the events and circumstances that define our existence. (Lawlor, 1997, pp. 25-6)

Understanding the intricacies in a conversation surrounding academic advising enables the definition of "house" to emerge to an even greater extent. Serving as both a noun and a verb, both definitions are essential to the lived

experience of the academic advisor. As explored in Chapter One, a “house” is defined as a building that serves as living quarters for one or a few families. As a verb, the definition means to provide with living quarters or shelter (www.m-w.com).

Since they serve both as the foundation for the noun, and the motivation for the verb, in what way(s) do these seemingly different goals come together for academic advisors? How does the ability of the house to shelter and protect, combined with being a place of dwelling, reflect the goals and expectations of academic advising for the advisor? Lawlor (1997) explains that the “sheetrock walls and ceilings. . . provide impersonal containers for our possessions. They do little to create vessels for soulmaking” (p. 27). Seemingly, then, many of the explicitly defined expectations of the university about the relationship between student and advisor, between advisor and advising, such as the counting of credits, the filling of requirements, the meeting of grade point averages, and the procedures for selecting majors do little to contribute toward the foundations of the broader education needed by students. Therefore, the experience of academic advising needs to play an active role in building that more holistically soul-full experience that is college. Advisors aid in accomplishing this goal, creating a sense of place and being for themselves and the students with whom they interact. Lawlor (1997) also suggests that “A home for the soul is not the result of a particular style of design . . . repeating the past is not a necessary part of creating dwelling places of the soul” (p. 27). It is up to the students to make their own way, find their own motivators, and up to the academic advisor to ensure that the path is a visible and accessible one. For advisors and students, the

structure for doing academic advising is lit from within by those who have come before.

Heidegger (1971/2001) explains an important distinction between the “building” as experienced separately by the student and by the academic advisor, the interchange between the noun and the verb: “We do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell, that is, because we are dwellers” (p. 146). There is something comforting about that which is known, the place we come to dwell and know as our own. We tend to surround ourselves with people, objects, and experiences that allow us to make meaning, that allow us to become inhabitants of our surroundings. This realization helps us recognize that the building, the creation of home in the academic journey is a shared experience by student and advisor. The joint experience of doing academic advising means that one cannot succeed without the other. Both must assume an active role in the creation, the design, the implementation of plans and ideas, and together, the building’s structure gains life and depth.

Heidegger (1971/2001) explores dwelling as a place of permanence, a place of comfort from which we are able to build. Academic advisors build two places at once: one place for them to dwell and build their own personal and professional relationships and experiences, and another place they create with their students to dwell and call their own for their approximate four year tenure.

The experience of doing academic advising allows one to incorporate the experience of the noun with the understandings of the verb in the building of a collegiate experience for students. The notions of creating a space, establishing a

foundation, and outlining the structure of the finished whole allow advisors to plan, navigate, and construct the building that they and their students inhabit throughout their collegiate experiences. By helping students navigate the structures, by empowering them to construct their own academic experiences, and through the exploration of various approaches to that construction, academic advisors, through their metaphorical dwelling, allow for the building that occurs with, and with-in, their students.

In considering the use of metaphor in the exploration of a phenomenon, van Manen (2003) explains, “The question, ‘Did I do that right?’ forces us to come to terms with the *particular* under the guidance of our understanding of the *universal*” (p. 79). Advisors, too, confront that question on an almost daily, if not hourly, basis. After one particularly difficult semester, I had three students come in on the same day after finding out they had been academically dismissed due to their poor academic performances. They were all independently scared, nervous, and insecure about what step to take next. They became van Manen’s “particular.” “What should I do?” they universally want to know. “What should *I* do?” I parrot to myself. What should I tell them? I worry that I might give them the wrong advice. The experience of doing advising dips a bit, and becomes less balanced, less structured. “Should I apply for reenrollment?” I do not know—should they? In two of the three cases, I do not think they should. I think they should, in essence, dismiss themselves, pick up and move, attempt to re-build in another academic home, at least for a semester. For the third student, I think she should move her structure around a bit, and hope the winds of

judgment will blow with her instead of against her. My day ends at 5 p.m., ten hours after it began. As I walk to my car, I echo van Manen: “Did I do that right?”

Van Manen (2003) explains:

. . . Phenomenological themes are not objects or generalizations; metaphorically speaking they are more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes. Themes are the stars that make up the universes of meaning we live through. By the light of these themes we can navigate and explore such universes. (p. 90)

The experience of the metaphoric “knots in the webs” are a *double entendre* for academic advisors. The whole purpose of the academic advisor is to help deal with knots not of their own making, and restructuring of webs not meant for them. The advisor’s role as creator, however, is mandated in the construction, and their experience of completion is defined by their position. They must be an active part of the spinning of the webs to allow the “meaningful whole” to emerge. Even the language of academic advising is replete with themes that make reference to building, housing, creating, establishing, and supporting. Discussions about “development as a student” and “development as a person” (Earwaker, 1992, pp. 13-16) stress the importance of growth and creation. Additional literature focused on academic advising incorporates discussions of “the integration of academic goals with other life goals” and the “teaching function whereby the advisor assists students in using rational processes, environmental and interpersonal interactions, behavior awareness, and evaluation skills” (Winston et al., 1982, pp. 6-7). Throughout these processes, advisors are charged with helping to design, build, shape, arrange, restructure, redesign, renovate, and renew.

Heidegger (1971/2001) explains:

[Buildings] are so called because they are made by a process of building construction. Of what sort this making—building—must be, however, we find out only after we have first given thought to the nature of those things which of themselves require building as the process by which they are made. (p. 152)

The academic literature, however, is rarely focused on the nature of the duality of development in the advising relationship. As does most literature for any profession, it generally ignores the development of the academic advisor actually doing the advising and always focuses on the experience of the student receiving the advising. The development of student understanding is much more validated than the experience of the advisor, and even than their dual relationship. The process which Heidegger identifies as central to the nature of holistic experience is not centered here, and is barely even peripheral. Light (2001) in a chapter called “Good Mentoring and Advising” writes:

Young men and women arriving at college immediately confront a set of decisions. Which courses to choose? What subject to specialize in? What activities to join? How much to study? How to study? Such decisions are intensely personal. Often they are made with little information. Yet their consequences can be enormous. A subject that is bypassed, or study habits that are mismatched for certain classes, can result in limited options, reduced opportunities, or closed doors. Advisors play a critical role. They can ask a broad array of questions, make a few suggestions, that can affect students in a profound and continuing way. (p. 84)

The academic literature does not focus on the experience of the advisor in assisting and creating the student experience; it does not stress or even consider the “advisor as creator.” The majority of advising literature tells advisors “how to” be an advisor, a mentor, or a counselor (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Earwaker, 1992; Jeruchim & Shapiro, 1992; King, 1993; King, 2000; Parker, 1978; Winston et al., 1984; and Zachary, 2000). All provide resources for the advisor wishing to learn

“how to” be a good advisor, providing suggestions on “how to” provide suggestions, “how to” be available to students, “how to” foster a mentoring relationship, “how to” encourage and discourage safely and honestly. The literature, however, does not frame the journey of the academic advisor’s own evolutionary and intentional interactions with and for students, and about themselves. It does not place them as a part of their own journey, but only as a tandem to that of someone else. It also assumes there is an answer, a single one, to all of the “how to” questions, and that each advisor will approach situations in a similar manner. As most advisors discover, there is never a single answer, never a single approach, and even the presumption to predict the numerous questions creates an insurmountable challenge.

Winston et al. (1984) tell us that “As long as there have been colleges, there has been a need for students to receive guidance and assistance as they plan their programs of study, become adjusted to the college environment . . . and face the rigors of growing up” (p. ix), and, almost as an aside, remind us that “Students need to realize that advisors are themselves people . . .” (p. 94). Troublingly absent in this assessment is the complicated nature of “growing up,” assuming that the academic advisors themselves have (a) done so already, and (b) can predict the path that everyone else will take. This is far from the case, as everyone brings their own baggage to this building, although the burden of carrying it is often shared by many who dwell here.

It is important that advisors realize that, in fact, there is no possible way to prepare the answers ahead of time even for the predictable questions. Each student will present different needs and expectations, and each advisor will address each

student in a different way. Hooks (1990) suggests that an individual's placement in an experience is critical for involvement and true understanding. "Such a contrast, that feeling of arrival, of homecoming, the sweetness and bitterness of that journey" (p. 41) is exactly the dilemma facing academic advisors. There is a desperate needing to be wanted, helpful, and placed within the academic house belonging to others as they make their way toward completion, yet we also recognize that we cannot go home again ourselves. Our own journey is complete, and it cannot, and should not, be reconstructed in this time and place of another. We all need to have a place that is secure, where we feel valued, yet we need to empower our students to find that place for themselves instead of hastily throwing up walls and calling it "home." Casey (1993) writes of that paradox of homecoming, "whereby we *come home* to what may no longer *be* a home for us . . . to discover that the identical structure no longer encloses the same domesticity" (p. 300). In essence, academic advisors continually re-place their own academic experience with the experiences of others, seeking the structure that they inhabited in a prior experience, and making sense of the new surroundings in the current one. Yet, reality demands that we separate one academic home from an-other, recognize that the home in which we dwell as professionals is very different from the home that we help others build. Yet, we share the same space, the same dreams for completion and satisfaction, the same expectations for the neighbors and by-passers of our dwelling-place. Yet, we are separate and apart, even as we join together in the creation. What is the experience of the duality of space?

Sadly, that "place" for academic advisors goes virtually un-addressed, which creates an increasing need to focus on the role of the advisors and their own

experiences of doing academic advising. In establishing a holistic basis of academic experiences that are the goal of every academic advisor for every student, the exploration of the experience of doing academic advising in charting academic territory would seem to demand consideration. Lawlor (1994) recognizes this: “Every building is born in the mind of its creator . . . a piece of architecture grows from the desire to shape the world around us in ways that support our needs and dreams” (pp. 3-4). Every orientation, every meeting with a first semester student or a new transfer student opens new doors, new opportunities for building, for designing, and for creating new ideas, new experiences, and new knowledge. Berman (1994) suggests that “Call requires that we take responsibility for using the building blocks given to us . . . and see what can be done with them” (p. 8).

The ability of academic advisors to recognize, address, and resolve numerous issues, and to predict the most useful approaches in doing so helps them to re-define themselves in the place-meant of the academic building. The ongoing flexibility and durability of the academic relationship depends wholly on the overlapping roles of both builder and dweller, and can only be as good as either’s experience and intention in the relationship allow.

Defining the “Egotecture:” Infusing Experience into Theory

A building is not an object when seen through the powers of the soul, but a being whose subjectivity has been suppressed . . . The house is more than a box within which to live; it is a soul activity to be retrieved from the numbness of the world of modern objects. Each place of the house, each room, hallway, closet, stair and alcove is a distinct structure that animates different aspects of the soul. (Sardello, 1992, pp. 35-6)

Home is a container of soul. The roof and walls shelter and nurture the spark of life that animates our modes of dwelling. They define the setting where soul is transformed from raw energy into myriad experiences of living.

Furniture, clothing, and other objects foster the inner work of the psyche. A stove, for example, is an appliance that translates the undefined stuff of spirit into experiences of nourishment. The bed encourages the soul to dream and make love. Each element of a home plays its role in bringing forth the latent possibilities of soul. (Lawlor, 1997, p. 22)

Certainly, then, it is essential that we think of the creation and building of a house through a care-full consideration of those who use it. Lawlor (1997) suggests that we involve ourselves so completely in the process of building, that the finished product literally becomes a part of us, the insertion of ego into the architecture, “egotecture.” Similarly, academic advisors seek to insert themselves and their experiences into the development and the experiences of their students, searching for success through the efforts of others, offering suggestions and encouragements that make us part of an-other’s academic journey.

There is no guaranteed security in that journey, however. Casey (1993) introduces the metaphor of being at sea, in the midst of something constantly changing. “Any stability we experience is precarious. Even though we know where we are in relation to other places, we lack a sense of where our own place is” (p. 109). This sense of wandering is, inevitably, experienced by academic advisors and their students. Casey further explains, “When we cannot find a habitable place, we must set about making or building such a place to ensure stable inhabitation” (p. 109).

The necessity of identifying the various needs of the students ahead of time, to anticipate study and sleep schedules, to anticipate extra- and co-curricular commitments, and the personal tendencies of individual students make the creation of a successful academic experience much like a jigsaw puzzle. Sometimes the pieces fit, and sometimes they do not. It often goes beyond the defined role of the academic

advisor to put together the pieces to form the whole of the student's academic journey through college.

Baxter Magolda (2000) reiterates:

The learning expectations we have for college students require complete intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive levels of development . . . higher education has been clear about the desired destination of this journey, that we want students to inhabit; educators have been less clear about the farms on which students currently live and how to map the journey from one to the other. (p. 88)

These “less clear” areas subsequently fall to academic advisors to negotiate. The blueprints for today's college students are virtually limitless. There is every conceivable avenue available for study, and the need to determine and commit to the plans relatively early. Many students find comfort through their creation of an academic house resembling that of their parents or older siblings, sometimes seeking to follow blueprints that are somewhat outdated in terms of the needs and abilities of a different generation with different goals and expectations. The ability of the student, and then the advisor, to recognize this sometimes necessary re-positioning is often the most difficult challenge that college poses. There are numerous students who are “supposed” to go into business and are bored by accounting and finance, who “need to” go to medical school and do not like biology, who “must” major in computer science “if you ever want to find a job,” and have no head for numbers. These are the students who finally must learn to create and inhabit their own house, to exorcise the demons of the huge paycheck and a “good job,” and re-place themselves within their own experience, finding their own way into creative writing, theater and dance, and ancient history. It becomes the role of the academic advisor to facilitate such rezoning

and redecorating, while being sensitive to their own memories of choices offered and decisions made, when they dwelled as students in another time and place.

Uncovering Hidden Bricks

P'nina, a preliminary conversant, had little formal academic advising experience, although she had extensive experience as a volunteer advisor before she started her full time position as an academic advisor in a large state university.

A lot of students come in and say "I need to see a counselor." So, even though I am supposed to be the 'formal academic advisor,' I feel myself kind of filling [the counseling] role. No matter what the job description says, when I sit in this office I go beyond that little square box we put ourselves in when we call ourselves "academic advisors."

On paper and during campus conversations, academic advisors and counselors make an important distinction between counseling and advising. Advising is based on the notion of giving "advice," and is, officially, concerned mostly with the academic experiences and choices of students. Counselors are there to assist students with more personal issues, struggles and concerns. What the majority of those who wish to distinguish so clearly between the two fail to realize is that usually one is inextricably tied into the other. As Chickering and Reisser (1993) find, "All members of the college community are affected by the emotions of the students as they live out their dramas inside and outside the classroom . . . we build competence by learning behaviors and linking them together" (p. 84).

As P'nina and numerous other advisors find out, the indication that something is "wrong" is usually first measured by poor academic performance. It becomes the symptom of a larger problem, but it is usually the safest, most comfortable issue for

students to approach and try to address. Subsequently, the counseling role, by necessity, emerges from the experiences of the academic role.

In her study on mentoring, Zachary (2000) found the ability to “provide adequate support, appropriate challenge, and ample vision” (p. 117) is critical in a supportive academic relationship. The ability to recognize the needs of the students and one’s expectations as an advisor, to respond appropriately in a manner that empowers the students to seek their own resolutions, to know what resources are available to them, and to encourage them to self-evaluate are central aspects of doing academic advising. However, often the process that creates the ability to respond to and develop those aspects goes far beyond the specified definition of the “academic advisor” title and the “academic advising” definition, and many advisors find themselves in somewhat different waters than were originally expected or professionally defined.

As Heath (1978) suggests, “When we educate or counsel, we must inevitably ask, Educate or counsel for what purpose” (p. 189). For the academic advisor, the holistic nature of student interactions is present in virtually all encounters. To advise a student solely on academics is generally to ignore the nature of academic concerns and awarenesses. Garing (1993) finds it essential that advising “is perceived and delivered as intrusive, and developmental, and serves as a catalyst for building personalized student-adviser (sic) relationships” (p. 97).

Creating Structural Support

There have been numerous times when a student was struggling academically and I asked what was going on only to be told that a parent had been killed when a

plane crashed into the Pentagon, or that someone's parents were going through a bad divorce and neither parent was willing to pay for tuition, or that someone was feeling depressed and had not left his dorm room for three days. I often say "Oh," and wish for more training to think how to respond more deeply. I struggle to help students who are going through experiences I have never gone through, or even thought about. I clearly am being invited into the experience of this student far beyond the academic realm. I listen, and then I try to refer students to the Counseling Center, but for some reason that sometimes feels like giving up, like a failure in our relationship. They have confided in me, and I am passing them off to someone else, inviting someone else into the relationship to handle a situation that does not fall under my job description. What is the experience of being limited by role and status?

The students often comment that they are busy, or they have exams coming up, or that they already tried to talk with someone and no appointments were available. Sometimes they just take the piece of paper I have written the Counseling Center's contact information on without comment. I sense that they probably will not follow up. An academic advisor quickly learns important key phrases like "How are you feeling about that today?" and "What are you thinking might help you at this point?" as responses to such statements, putting it back on the students to think about their problems, and hopefully empowering them to resolve them. We also learn to gently, subtly, introduce the idea of "professional counseling" to students who might be resistant to the concept, culturally or psychologically biased about going to see a counselor to talk about personal problems. It adds a wrinkle to the construction of our

concept of “doing academic advising” since much of the “doing” might mean “sending out” for outside consultants.

Jordyn, another preliminary conversant, also had no formal experience as an academic advisor, but had an extensive background in study skills and counseling when she began her position as the director of an academic advising office at a large public university.

At my previous institution, we were counselors, too. We would find out a student had failed a midterm exam, and then find out the student was being molested. We were definitely expected to meet the immediate needs of the student. Here I really have not developed a core group of students [because of the size of the population]. For me here, I think . . . it’s more of an academic focus. I try to still establish a rapport with a student, and a trust level, and how everyone does that is different.

How every advisor approaches an advising session is different, and how each individual student experiences attempts at creating a rapport within the advising realm also varies. The traditional “caring” is often replaced by necessity, even expediency. The time usually is restricted somewhat, and generally so is the focus. There is rarely any expectation of personal crisis resolution or intervention within the realm of academic advising, only an official and academic response to academic questions. Sometimes, however, the advisor is surprised by the candidness of a student response. Jordyn recounts a time when a student she was advising seemed to be struggling with thoughts of suicide.

I asked him if he had been thinking about hurting himself and he nodded his head yes. I asked him if he had been thinking about killing himself, and he again nodded his head. Then I asked him how he was thinking of doing it, so I could determine how much thought he had really put into it. He didn’t have a specific answer, which I thought was good, but I did ask him if I could walk him up to the Counseling Center. Now, not everyone is going to ask a student how they are thinking about killing themselves. Some people will give them a hug, and others will avoid the question altogether. Everyone definitely has to

find their own comfort zone, but also realize what is in the best interest of the student.

All academic advisors find themselves constantly faced with figuring out how to establish a rapport and find a “comfort zone” with a student they may see once a semester, once a year, or once in a college career. Just as the overwhelming goal of every student is to feel good about the encounter, the goal of every advisor is to “get it,” and that often means trying to identify deeper meanings, deeper intentions, and deeper goals than are sometimes actually present. The failure to identify them if they are there, however, runs the risk of failure for the academic advisor. The larger difficulty of this for most new academic advisors, and even seasoned ones, is remembering the one-way nature of the relationship, figuring out the depth of inquiry that each student wants, and figuring out how to best hear their voices instead of our own (Flickinger, 1992).

Across the experience of academic advisors, some of the recurring themes that emerge are the senses of caring and responsibility for helping students successfully make their way through the maze of academia. As Berman (1994) explains, “Being called to care invites us to be with others” (p. 12). In making decisions about their academic lives, “Students must take responsibility for the implementation of their decisions and for their consequences” (Kreisberg, 1992, p. 171). However, although Kreisberg argues that students learn that decisions do have consequences, and that “with empowerment comes responsibility” (p. 171), much does fall to the advisor in helping to equip the students to be successful.

Jordyn shares that “The big benefit is that I love working with students,” and most academic advisors readily acknowledge that they view what they are doing as

far more than helping students be successful in their college classes. Many advisors also undertake the challenge of preparing students to be successful in life, to learn how to make choices for the long term, which is an all-encompassing job. She remembers:

Staying in tune with trends, staying in tune with cutting edge information so that you can continuously provide for the ever-changing needs of the student population is the biggest challenge. And not being able to help somebody, because you're stuck. You're stuck by policy, or stuck by whatever, so you just can't help somebody. It's also hard to be okay with knowing that I can't help somebody who can't help themselves.

By nature academic advisors are mostly “people persons.” They like to help people, as defined by the very nature of their positions, and they find great satisfaction in “happy endings.” They are care-full. They are invested in others through their positions, their time, and their own needs and expectations. Noddings (1984) suggests that “At bottom, all caring involves engrossment . . . apprehending the other's reality, feeling what he feels as nearly as possible, is the essential part of caring” (pp. 16-17). Subsequently, it is sometimes difficult to remain neutral, to remember that the battles need to be fought mostly by the student, and for the advisor, it sometimes needs to be enough to just have input without resolution.

Noddings (1992) explains that a caring relation is, “In its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings—a carer and a recipient of care” (p. 15). This kind of caring relationship is selfless on the part of the provider, and is not necessarily reciprocal. It is sometimes hard to remember that the rapport is established solely for the benefit of the students, the care-recipient. Earwaker (1992) makes an important observation concerning this relationship. “It is a mistake to suppose that discussion of more personal matters, possibly of a confidential nature,

presupposes a relationship that is closer, warmer, or more intimate. An effective relationship will not be a cosy (sic) one” (p. 68).

This means that academic advisors have to give one hundred percent toward another person, but accept that they often receive little tangible benefit, if any, in return. Noddings (1992) further suggests that “Engrossment or attention may only last a few moments and it may or may not be repeated in future encounters, but it is full and essential in any caring encounter” (p. 16). Academic advisors learn to establish caring relationships that can last five minutes or four years, or more. They learn that caring means asking difficult questions, listening patiently and fully, and accepting variations in maturity, goals, and approaches to learning. They negotiate the experience of “being present,” while acknowledging that “how one is present to another is more important than what one does” (Slunt, 1994, p. 110).

Academic advisors focus on trying to understand motivations that often have no basis in their own reality, interacting with students who have completely different interpretations and understandings of life. They struggle for proficiency, accepting that “competence is a process of becoming, a process of growth . . . [with] an inner awareness that that competence is a goal to be achieved and never an end in itself” (Slunt, 1994, p. 121). Academic advisors come to care about things they know little about, and things of which they have never heard. They learn to care about different experiences, goals, and intentions, and ultimately, embody the idea that “We cannot care for ourselves in any meaningful way in isolation from others” (Berman, 1994, p. 90). Further, “The essence of being called to care is in response . . . each response being contingent on understanding persons and their contexts” (Berman, p. 11).

James, a graduate assistant in an advising office at a large state university, came to be an academic advisor without seeking it out. It was a minor part of his graduate assistant job description that primarily had him serving as a peer mentoring coordinator, with five hours of his twenty hours per week being dedicated to academic advising.

I don't know if I've ever had a very conscious method of advising. For me I consider it a conversation for the most part. I just try to get a conversation started with them that leads wherever it leads.

Kolb (1997) asks, "Can something that is not fully formed and definite still direct us as we carry forward language and action?" (p. 65). It seems that the majority of academic advising conversations are not fully formed in the mind of the advisor or the student prior to the conclusion of the interaction. Indeed, the ability to feel comfortable with the divergent roles of carer and cared for is a challenge to even the most seasoned advisor. How can an academic advisor who is truly focused on making a difference find fulfillment in a one way relationship? In what ways does the experience of academic advising expand to allow for personal development for both student and advisor? Advisors endeavor to negotiate a path through the experience of academic advising and find fulfillment in their own care-full considerations of the relationships they establish with students.

Listening to the Easements

Listening to needs, and listening to their communication, are not simple processes of discovery, processes merely 'noticing' wants and needs that are already fully formed; rather they are processes of learning, growth, and self-creation. Need interpretation, and the listening this entails, must be understood as a hermeneutical process: a process, therefore, to which the communicative dialectic can make a distinctive and often decisive contribution. (Levin, 1989, p. 128)

Another common theme that emerges is the critical nature of listening, by both the advisor and the student. Nichols (1995) finds that “Listening takes effort” (p. 75), and that “The sometimes vast difference between words spoken and thoughts intended is nothing compared to the often vaster gulf between what is said and what is heard” (Nichols, p. 80). “Good listening” establishes the connection between student and academic advisor. The nature of being a “good listener,” however, is not enough.

Flickinger (1992) reminds us:

Hearing and listening are never purely sensory acts. We may hear the same sounds, but we listen for the meaning that the sounds evoke. And so what is heard depends on who is listening. And the way we listen depends on the way we stand in the world. (p. 186)

Being able to identify the student’s goals becomes a critical part of the advising experience, and this usually is done without the advisor saying a word. It is important, however, that the advisor be able to filter the student’s words, to “listen through” the advisor’s own experiences to hear the needs of the student. Levin (1989) asserts that “Our hearing becomes an ‘art of living.’ The art of skilful (sic) hearing . . . is our response-ability in relation to the original gift of nature” (p. 2).

Academic advisors spend much of their time listening actively. Even when they are talking to students, they listen to things that are not being said. Sometimes things appear on a transcript that are not addressed, and other times questions are not asked as students prepare for graduation. Advisors need to listen to the things that are not asked as much as the things that are.

Students, too, listen to things that are not said. An advisor answering email during an appointment, or the telephone, or using Instant Messenger (IM) “speaks”

volumes to a student about his relationship with the advisor in the room. Sometimes, when I do not want students to feel pressured that I am watching them fill out a form, or rushing them to finish a checklist for study abroad, I will check my email. I have “Caller-ID” on my phone, and sometimes, when I can see who the caller is, I will answer the phone during an appointment. I always say “Excuse me just one second, it’s my boss” or “Oh-it’s my dad, just a second.” Then I wonder how I would feel if one of my advisors did that to me. What is the experience of explaining choices in a relationship? If I tell the student to take his time with the form he is working on and I will check email until they are ready to talk, is that absolution for the act of not paying attention? Just because I tell the student who the caller is, does that excuse the interruption? If I do that, is it acceptable for a student to text-message while I am completing her audit? It seems hypocritical to say “no” to her if I do something similar while I am waiting. The walls sometimes sway between us, as we each wonder how sturdy the structure might be.

A student I have never met before comes in for advising to inform me that his mother passed away the month before. He does not ask for anything, he just wants to “let the College know.” I listen carefully to what is being said, and realize I only have a few minutes to figure out what isn’t. I express my sympathy for his loss, and ask how he has been doing. “How are you?” Cameron (1992) addresses our verbal obligations to this phrase. She finds that “The authentic ‘How are you’ pulls us into a deep mystery. It addresses that which is not yet as if it already exists” (p. 185). I am subconsciously aware both of the obligation and anomaly the question brings forth. I try to direct the response a bit, and ask if he has been in touch with his teachers, and

how classes are going. I use questions to try to listen, to try to hear through the news he has shared with me. I try to listen to the responsibility of my role and the responsibility of the College, and listen to the emptiness he is facing as we approach the holidays.

All academic advisors learn to listen in their own way, at their own pace, and for their own reasons in order to help build relationships with the students with whom they interact. They try to listen with “an openness that precedes wanting to hear” (Levin, 1989, p. 230), to meet students where they are, instead of substituting the students’ words for the advisor’s own experiences. Levin (1989) connects our desire for “authentic living” through this process. “Our listening is a competence which is not just cognitive; it is always affective and motivational as well” (p. 43). Although not every student needs, or even desires, a true connection with an advisor, it is our listening which opens that possibility to every student.

Exploring the Floor Plans

The collegiate experiences of students will bring them into contact with various academic advisors who have different concepts and goals concerning their own ability to create, to build academic experiences for students. With each different advisor, there is likely to be a very different kind of experience. Jordyn tells students that if they find an advisor they like, they should try to see them as often as possible. It seems like a minor request, asking for an advisor’s business card, but for both the advisor and the student, it indicates the potential for a future relationship. It lays a very tentative groundwork upon which to build a longer term relationship, an indication that input, and insights are invited. For P’nina, “It’s nice when students ask

for you every time they come in. It's nice to feel requested and, even if it is only every few months, it's still a continuity that makes years connect, one to another." As Mohanty (1997) explains, "Experiencing is directly observable by its subject. It is immediately felt, if not known" (p. 177). The experience of academic advisors learning to feel connected to the students they encounter allows the creation of relationships to gain support, a foundation based in mutual investment. Such encounters, the feeling of being requested, appreciated, sought out, and subsequently recognized, acknowledged, and welcomed, enforce the decisions that advisors and students make during an advising relationship in a tangible way. We assume that students who do not like our advice would not request us in the future. We depend on our abilities to guide us in advising appointments, but depend on such future "feedback," based on past experience, to reinforce our perceptions of how we have done our jobs.

In what ways is experience transferred from one to another? How does the academic advisor learn to communicate experience in a way that opens up a conversation about the building to come for a student? Can the advisor translate those conversations into lessons for their own growth and a building of that which is unknown?

The ways in which academic advisors move students and themselves from an unknown place is a journey by both student and advisor to discover that which is "known." As Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) explain, "Since knowledge comes from experience, the only way [people] can hope to understand another person's ideas is to try to share the experience that has led the person to form

the idea” (p. 113). The advisor, as much as the student, in searching to explain what might be “known,” is also in search of her own understanding. “Journey,” comes from the Old French *journee*, a day’s work or travel, from the Latin *diurnata*, the events of the day (Barnhardt, 1995, p. 407). The academic journey is a task undertaken between student and academic advisor as a partnership, and as a part of that journey, the advisor is expected, if not required, to form extensive and numerous partnerships in fulfillment of his or her own personal journey through academe. The ability of advisors subsequently to recognize each other’s journeys, and to encounter and encourage different approaches to building the academic houses for students, allows for continuity and experimentation with the process.

Choosing the Walkway(s)

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that, the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
(Frost, as cited in McMichael, 1989, pp. 936-37)

There are infinite choices available to academic advisors with each student they encounter. The expectation that we need to explore each option, each path for every student is sometimes a difficult thing. We all have good days and bad days, easy appointments and difficult ones. Occasionally we wonder why we bother—we think we know best, and who is the student to challenge our advice? We might forget that we did not originally set out to be academic advisors. We followed our own meandering paths into the world of student and academic affairs. Sometimes the path we advise, the path we choose for our students does not allow for such wandering, such choices. Sometimes we forget that students might need the opportunity to choose their own path, make their own way, and that our role is to support their decisions, not to make them. We tend toward the known, the comfortable in our advising conversations, neglecting, at times, to even offer alternative paths. Some academic advisors continually find themselves caught directing students toward the familiar path, instead of exploring the one “less traveled.” They tend toward the well-worn, that which works, and has worked, and will continue to work as students strive toward graduation. This is limiting in the building, the creation of students’ academic experiences.

Noddings (1992) asserts that students “need motivation to undertake studies energetically,” and that we need to “examine carefully what we are doing and what happens despite our best intentions” (p. 114). As advisors, there is an interesting phenomenon with our students. We sometimes feel the opportunity to live somewhat vicariously; we may tend to push students beyond their own goals and aspirations to help us retroactively achieve our own. It is reminiscent of the parent who lives

through their academically- or athletically-talented child, wanting the achievements of the child to reflect on the parent. Advisors, too, sometimes live through students and do things we never did, or wished we had done, in college ourselves. We talk to students about our own study abroad experiences, our own decisions about majors, our own favorite classes and teachers. We try to teach through experience that often does not exist anymore. We use our knowledge to influence students, but really, what right, what obligation do we have to make such decisions?

What happens when academic advisors choose the academic path for students—if they interrupt the student’s chosen path? If the academic advisor fails to offer options, either intentionally or unintentionally, for the different paths available to students, is it still “advising?” Is it possible for “advising” to become “decision-ing” if paths are not presented? Moore (1996) suggests that “Metamorphosis doesn’t happen without our artful participation” (p. 74). Surely in the lived experience of academic advisors, the numerous paths traveled by students have room for, and even demand, our input. We owe it to the students, however, to present a full accounting of the available paths if they are to find their own way, be it lesser traveled or not.

Winston (1996) reminds us, however, that not all students enter the advising partnership as equal, or even willing, partners. He identifies several characteristics of students who might struggle with understanding the depth of certain academic problems or concerns, students who are unable to analyze and understand their own behavior in a rational and responsible way, students who show a lack of motivation to address issues and concerns, and students who are completely unable to focus on the task at hand.

In what ways do academic advisors endeavor to renovate the academic houses their students inhabit? In what ways is the renovation also a renewal of the advisor's own experiences and goals? The educational house of academe is dependent on the foundation identified by one and walked upon and lived in by another. Toward what end is the academic advising relationship viewed and experienced as a kind of partnership?

Josh, an Orthodox Jewish student, comes from a faith based in early preparation. He likes to prepare early, to start his academic *sukkah* a bit ahead of time so he can plan for and anticipate the journey that would be his college experience. He is interested in exploring many paths, sometimes too many, since he ultimately needs to make progress in one direction and not the many in which he finds himself interested. Since our first meeting as a freshman, Josh has come to see me more than three dozen times. Our conversations are often centered around the planning of his next year, his decisions to earn a citation in music, his struggle with being rejected and then elation at being accepted into his departmental major's honors program, until at last, it has come time for him to graduate. He has, typically, chosen some paths on his own, and has had others chosen for him. "Do you do advising for 'real life,' too?" he asks at one of our last meetings. I laugh and he goes on his way, but I do realize that his three and a half years here have been a partnership between student and advisor; we have both brought forth elements into the relationship focused on his graduation.

"Partnership," deriving from the Middle English "partener," usually involves a close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and

responsibilities. Certainly Josh and I have signed numerous advising contracts laying out the expectations of advisor and advisee. We have also joined together in an agreement that he will work and I will guide as we approach his graduation together.

I think I have tried my best to guide him through the various academic paths available to him, without allowing him to be overwhelmed completely by the infinite possibilities college offers. We make steps forward and backward; his mother passed away during his junior year, and I disagreed strongly with some of his class choices during his senior year. He wanted to take them because he heard they were “easy.” “It’s college—it isn’t supposed to be easy.” I think he should be wanting to take more interesting classes, and he thinks he should be protecting his sanity. In the end, he “wins,” and I respect his need for academic self-preservation. I also realize the long term investment I made in helping him identify the paths that are right for him are not always the paths I would choose for myself, or other students. I am able to acknowledge, however, that his ability to be confident in challenging me and my wishes for the academic integrity of his degree are, in large part, due to what we developed together through our advising sessions. I equipped him to be a decision-maker, and through that ability he now is empowered to find success and contentment. The solid foundation for his future life choices has been laid through the building that is academic advising.

The Clay Structure of Another’s House of Advising

Recently, another phenomenologist engaged with the phenomenon of academic advising. Using the metaphor of a potter, he explores the advising experience of advisors as they interact with first year students. Using the myth of

Cura, the potter who creates a human from clay taken from a riverbed, his research connects the advisors to the joy found in caring for students during their first year of college as they seek a concrete form. “The connection to *Cura* within each advisor resounds in resoluteness, transcendence, and potential for being” (Limbaugh, 2004, p. ii). Stressing the emphasis on the “care” that the initial creating with clay requires, he draws a connection between the free-form of potters working with new clay and the free-form of advisors working with new freshmen, also somewhat formless as they begin their college journey. The “care” that emerges through the advisors is natural, a transformative care for both advisor and advisee.

I have found that my exploration into the essence of advising first-year college students has “re-centered” my own self. Now, in my advising, I find it easier to disengage from the pressing administrative duties of the day and to focus on the student. I am less inclined to posit myself as “the final answer,” listening more closely as students bring forth their issues, remembering the scope of challenges and decisions facing a first-year college student . . . I am more patient in providing whatever help I can to assist a student’s growth, and I am more compassionate when some students’ journeys toward self-discovery are marked by unexpected or hidden obstacles.

Most importantly, I am more comfortable with the self that is presented in my advising of first-year students, a self that embraces care and accepts the need to care as an integral part of its Being. (Limbaugh, 2004, pp. 267-8)

In Chapter Three, I examine the hermeneutic phenomenological underpinnings of the methodology for further uncovering the lived experience of academic advisors. Since this phenomenological study focuses on advisors who work with students over the course of their whole academic experience, this chapter focuses heavily on the lived existential nature of the academic advisors’ experiences in order to understand their orientations better for their personal journeys to be addressed in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER THREE: UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHICAL GROUNDING

Turning, turning. . .it seems that I am only going in circles. Turning, churning.

Literally, figuratively. . .do I even know what those words mean in the context of this writing?

I think I have found the light switch. . .I reach, reach, struggle to turn it on. It is stuck. Figures. Don't give up. There are other lights in this house. Find another switch. . .bulb is dim, but at least it is providing some light.

Hmmm. . .the shadows cast by the dimming light make me question what is real, and whether I am influencing those shadows as I stumble around trying to find my "place."

Is the dark better than this shadowed place, with all the possibilities only slightly visible, all beckoning with open fingertips. . .which stretch out towards me in a beckoning manner. . .yet still they reach out to me pulling, grasping. . .(what is that pull?)

Wait. . .they are not grasping at all. . .they are pointing. . .pointing. . .look at her, they signal, look at her.

I look. "What about me?" I ask out loud. "What about me?"

The light strengthens. . .I am still turning around and around as I sit still in my favorite chair. I unclench my fingers from the arms which were holding me in place and look right into my turning. I am steady. . . (Nadler, Fall, 1999)

The Bedrock of Understanding

At its core, the foundation of phenomenology is an idea. The all-encompassing nature of exploration of that idea is what creates the "coming-to" and "being-with" for the understandings, challenges and struggles of those who engage in phenomenological inquiry. The nature of the turning, as explored in the poem above, is a struggle with our own foundations of understanding and acceptance of experience. We quickly learn whether the phenomenological house we built is solid as often we turn the "wrong" way, or discover different paths than the ones we expected to find, or find paths we anticipated at different places than where we found

them. It is a constant process, both evolutionary and devolutionary, rewarding and frustrating, insightful and blinding. Ultimately, it is a process of “be-coming.”

Through the exploration of lived existence, of “be-ing,” phenomenology seeks to inform practice and suggests ways of coming into understanding beyond spoken language. Merleau-Ponty (1973) explains, “When I speak I discover what it is I wish to say” (p. 142). Phenomenological exploration allows us to begin to uncover meaning(s) that have been sifted over. Through etymological exploration, it helps one to find, or to rediscover, what has been shifted and redefined.

Phenomenology focuses on the lifeworld in its purest form prior to any interpretation. We pay attention to the study of lived experience by bringing attention to it, by reflecting on it. Thus the phenomenon is brought forward as an unfolding and a simplifying, as the exploration of how persons becoming “beings in the world” emerge. An ongoing internal search for the seeker, phenomenology is grounded in philosophy that embraces experienced knowing. Based in the search for “truth,” “understanding,” “knowing,” “being,” and “existence,” hermeneutic phenomenology is the art of interpretation, an ongoing movement back and forth—between text and experience, between the part and the whole, between self with self and self with others, between silence and conversation, between questioning and knowing, answers and reflections. “It is the breathing of meaning. In the flow of life, consciousness breathes meaning in a to and fro movement: a constant heaving between the inner and the outer” (van Manen, 2003, p. 36). It is the encounter with *Dasein*, Heidegger’s (1962/1967) exploration of our experience of being in the world with others, that allows us to rediscover our experience in the world, rather than our epistemological

understandings. Heidegger asserts the essential nature of the importance of the “Being inside” (p. 87) in the ability to ultimately “be” with others.

And no matter how this inner sphere may get interpreted, if one does no more than ask how knowing makes its way ‘out of’ it and achieves ‘transcendence,’ it becomes evident that the knowing which presents such enigmas will remain problematical unless one has previously clarified how it is and what it is.
(Heidegger, 1962/1967, p. 87)

For academic advisors, whose “being in” with others is grounded in the very foundation of their experience, the ability to go beyond the “asking” to true understanding is the essential nature of their own “being” in the world. An exploration of the philosophical grounding of such “being” allows for a deeper acknowledgement of the foundations of phenomenological inquiry.

According to Palmer (1969), historically, hermeneutic traditions are grounded in six different foundations, each “points to an important ‘moment’ or approach to the problems of interpretation . . . the very content of hermeneutics itself tends to be reshaped with these changes of standpoint” (pp. 33-34). The first tradition is based on biblical hermeneutics, which examines biblical and religious texts, and is mostly practiced by the privileged classes while looking down. The second tradition, philological hermeneutics, is comprised of an examination of how language/words contribute to understanding language. It focuses on asking “What is the text saying to us?” in the context of language and how it is used. An understanding and exploration of grammatical construction is important. The third tradition focuses on the study of scientific hermeneutics and grew from the humanist tradition. It asks what the method is to look at the human component when studying the human sciences. The fourth tradition, *Geisteswissenschaftliche* (Dilthey/Husserl), explores the foundations of how

we study human beings in the cultural arena. It asks how we get the spirit/essence as we study human phenomenon, and explores how we study the structure of a category. Philosophical hermeneutics, based on the philosophy of Heidegger and Gadamer, is the fifth tradition. It is the merging of hermeneutics and phenomenology and asks the following question: What is the meaning of being? The philosophical approach takes an ontological turn. Technology has created a disjointed, disconnected society, so this approach is focused on creating a different relationship with technology (especially Heidegger). The relationship should not be a subject-object interaction, but a subject-subject interaction. It must consider how we recover “beingness.” The sixth tradition, based on cultural hermeneutics (Ricœur/Habermas/Apel), adds a critical theory focus. It focuses on persons raising critical questions about the culture in which we find ourselves. We can be critical/observant of our tradition, but can never step out of it. It forms the basis of our ideological questioning (Mueller-Vollmer, 1997).

In this chapter, I provide a philosophic grounding for my study as well as describe how I carried out the study. In adopting the philosophical traditions of Heidegger and Gadamer to illuminate my phenomenological journey, I examine how the phenomenon has been constructed, both conceptually and structurally, and I revisit the philosophical foundations used to inform my exploration of the phenomenological experience of academic advising.

Unsettling the Foundation

As Husserl explored the lived world, he found necessity in “bracketing” the actual world in order to find truth, an “ultimate truth,” that he needed, wanted, to be actual and real. Yet he also recognized that it might be impossible to achieve without

an actual bracketing (Moran, 2000, p. 78). Academic advisors, too, often find themselves immersed in this concept of “bracketing.” Students often come to us with questions that run in so many directions that it would be virtually impossible to answer all of them in one meeting. We tend to “bracket” their questions, in order to more fully answer them. We try to limit the scope of conversation through this bracketing, sometimes intentionally not attending to some brackets in order to more fully attend to others. We also bracket our own understandings in order to more fully attend to theirs. It is a process of dis-covering that advisors experience through their encounters with students.

On several occasions I have met with students who are in relatively serious academic jeopardy who want to talk about law school or taking the GRE. I tell them that we need to make sure they can complete their undergraduate degree before moving on to graduate school. I bracket the “ultimate truth” as it exists for them at this moment: The reality that if they do not pass their classes this semester, they will never make it to graduation, much less law school.

A strong calling emerges for academic advisors as we deal with the ideas that students, and their parents, have for themselves. We often struggle not to view such a calling as a need for self-reflection. What would I do? What should I tell them? What will work best? What is my role in defining their future? We try to bracket our own needs and reactions in order to more fully be aware of our students.

Listening Through the Walls

A consideration of the nature of Heidegger’s (1962/1967) view of phenomenology is also very insightful as it is less of an attempt to note all the

characteristics of something and focuses instead on what calls our attention to the experience with the “thing.”

Thus to work out the question of being adequately, we must take an entity—the enquirer—transparent in his own being . . . This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being. (Heidegger, 1962/1967, p. 27)

There is less emphasis on thinking and more focus on how the phenomenon grabs us, trying to find a way, the ways, in which the person has established a relationship with the phenomenon, as “one can determine the nature of entities in their Being without necessarily having the explicit concept of the meaning of Being at one’s disposal” (Heidegger, 1962/1967, p. 27). He is not concerned with how we would describe the actual existence of the “thing,” but is deeply involved with how we would experience it, our primordial understanding(s). How do we come to be ourselves? How do we come to see ourselves, authentically, in relation to others? It is not how we know, but that we know. This resonates deeply with academic advisors, who know that the decisions cannot be theirs, but the presented options often are. The questions must come from the students themselves, and therein also lie the answers. It is up to the academic advisor, however, to help the “truth” emerge. We need to be “deeply involved” with the students, to seek insight and illumination in their struggles for success. They need to feel our commitment, or we cannot, and do not, connect.

Exploring the Grounds

Like phenomenology itself, academic advising is a process, a process which allows words to cause us to think of ordinary experiences in new ways, a process of wide-awakeness to the world around us. Gadamer (1975/2000) describes phenomenology as a hermeneutic playground: Encountering things in a surprising order, a revealing

self-presentation, a way of being in the world to make meaning. A primacy of play over the players is acknowledged. Yet, there is also the need to be aware of what we bring to the experience, a being aware of how we came to understand what we came to understand. What is it that happens within advisors that allows them to give answers to a complete stranger? From where do the answers come? What is it that happens within me that allows me to care so completely about someone I may never see again? What are the questions that will help move me closer to the phenomenon I am seeking to explore?

In phenomenology, I am the instrument, the research tool who is filtering things through my own interpretation. How is “being” revealed through questioning? How do new ideas and insights come into “being?” Through what process does the researcher become the research?

Rather than the end result of research, phenomenological text is the starting point for research, a leaping off point for ideas and searches. The significance of the language of the text compels us, personally challenges us, moves us to self-reflection, to group reflection, toward a transformation that allows us some grounded, interpretive sense and stance.

Understanding the Phenomenon: Coming Home Again

Whoever is searching for the human being first must find the lantern. (van Manen, 2003, p. 5)

The lantern van Manen refers to is our “being.” However, just having a lantern doesn’t mean you can see anything. You still need a wick, oil, and matches in order for illumination to occur. After all, light only reflects what it encounters.

Ontologically, phenomenology allows us to hold up a lamp and illuminate ourselves.

Through a consideration of myself and several other advisors presented in Chapters One and Two, I have come to understand the phenomenon of doing academic advising through the importance of “place.” The theme of place emerges from the metaphor I chose, that of building a house, as a physical, emotional, intellectual, and etymological experience that allows access into the deeper meaning of the lived experience of doing academic advising. Grounding my philosophical exploration in Heidegger, Casey, Levin and Merleau-Ponty, I explore how the elements of place help to construct the “being-within” for academic advisors, places that are constructed and reconstructed within the context of academic advising relationships with students and with other advisors.

The Location of Place

An important part of getting back into place is having a place to get back into. Since we don’t have any such place by the mere fact of existing on earth, we must build places in which to reside. In creating built places, we transform not only the local landscape but ourselves as subjects . . . (Casey, 1993, p. 111)

Van Manen argues that “Phenomenology is the study of essences [the study of ‘what is’] . . . It consists in relearning to look at the world” (lecture, 4/28/89). This basis of phenomenological exploration allows us to begin to open up the importance of the location of place for academic advisors. The “re-learning” van Manen addresses allows some insight into Heidegger’s philosophy, as explored by Levin (1985), concerning the physical nature of phenomenology: “prepare,” “await,” “receive.” Such concepts allow us to create receptive vehicles for the discovery to come. We focus on the comfort of the body, the mind, relationships and time. Levin asserts the emancipatory nature of such a search, and provides a way for us to clear

out our minds for the journey to come.

The recollection of Being is a process which has two distinct phases: (i) going down ‘into’ oneself, into the ‘innermost,’ or the most individual depths of oneself and (ii) re-claiming, or bringing forth, the potential to be developed. (Levin, 1985, p. 77)

The need for academic advisors to take steps toward reclaiming their own experiences, while understanding their place and the need for re-placement when advising with their students illuminates the ongoing nature of Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein*. *Dasein* invites and encourages us to rediscover our experience in the world (Heidegger, 1927/1967). Heidegger asserts our need to understand “being in” as “being in something” (Heidegger, 1927/1967, p. 79). I find this explored sense of “being in” to be essential to the “essence” of academic advising. We often need to become someone, and believe in someone in order for the relationships to be established. I recognize the complexity of the relationship between knowing and being known, between seeing and being seen for academic advisors and their students. The need for self-identity and other-identity allows for an understanding of the relationships advisors foster.

In truthful knowing we neither infuse the world with our subjectivity (as premodern knowing did) nor hold it at arm’s length, manipulating it to suit our needs (as is the modern style). In truthful knowing the knower becomes co-participant in a community of faithful relationships with other persons and creatures and things, with whatever our knowledge makes known. (Palmer, 1993, p. 32)

As explored in Chapter One, advisors spend a lot of time engaging in relationships within a physical space, within a place that is established to house the relationships they create with students. As Casey (1993) suggests, “Body and place belong together from the very beginning. Their fate is linked—not only at the start

but at subsequent stages as well” (p. 45). I have written about the importance of creating space, creating a place within space, about creating a place to dwell with others as essential to the experience of academic advising. The need to be, to be seen, to be understood, to be known through place is important for advisors. The notion of the advisor’s “place,” both the physical space of their office and the internal “place” in which professional academic advisors find themselves, is defining, both for self and for other, as a place for both be-ing and know-ing. The idea of the advisor’s physical body being a part of their “office” allows for a deeper exploration of that which is known, and that which could be known.

Platt (1996) argues that “Anything we would call a place has some kind of an inside” (p. 112). It is essential to the academic advisor to explore that inside, trying to understand the underpinnings of decisions made and decisions abandoned, arguments won and arguments never asserted, a consideration of “selves” whom are not our own, created and recreated course by course, semester by semester, year by year. We also do this for our own “selves,” student by student, conversation by conversation. It allows what Heidegger (1962/1967) calls *buan*, dwelling. It is:

The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are*. . . such building only takes care—it tends the growth that ripens into its fruit of its own accord . . . Here building, in contrast with cultivating, is a constructing. (p. 145)

The philosophy associated with place, and the building of place, allows for the exploration of the very basis of the definition of academic advising. The constructing of the college experience, the emergence of the college student, and even the self as explored for us and through others is dependent upon the building and placing of relevance and trust. As Palmer (1969) explains:

How different such an understanding of an object is from a mere intellectual comprehension . . . the being of something is disclosed not to the contemplative analytical gaze but in the moment in which it suddenly emerges from hiddenness in the full functional context of the world. (p. 133)

The Identity of Place

As I visited with other advisors in their “place,” it became apparent that there was a duality of dwelling. “Built places are extensions of our bodies” (Casey, 1993, p. 120). Our physical remembering of our own college experiences allows us insight, and sometimes prevents it, into the lived experiences of our students. As I advise students during orientation who are preparing to take their first college classes, I remember my own journey on my first day of “real” college as I walked down the street after my parents pulled away with the empty U-Haul. I remember that excitement and nervousness, the feeling that I truly had my whole life ahead of me, that I could do anything and be anyone I wanted. I was enthralled with the possibilities of who I would meet, what I would learn, and where I would end up. To some extent, all academic advisors viscerally experience that knot of memory deep within our churning stomachs every time we meet a new student. We try to recapture that excitement, that enthusiasm for the process of knowledge and endless opportunity. Of course, now that we know, now that we understand, we remember a little differently. The knot is a remembered being of a being-present with the experience. We already have experienced the be-ing that is yet to come for our students. We have been, we have seen, we have done—now it is time to empower others with the same ability, all the while encouraging them to find their own way, and to hold on to their own feelings of independence. Casey (1993) again allows us insight into this understanding:

Between finding our way and having a residence—between orientation and habitation—there is a whole domain of encroaching implacement. In this domain we are neither disoriented nor settled. We wander, but we wander in the vicinity of built places we know or are coming to know. Not discovery but better acquaintance is our aim. (p. 121)

It is an insistent, often demanding, dwelling which academic advisors have with their students, reinforcing, reconfiguring, recognizing change and growth and development. Advisors encounter as much through their own “being-with” as they do in the “being-with” others. As Heidegger (1962/1967) suggests, “The question of the meaning of Being must be *formulated* . . . every inquiry is a seeking (*Suchen*). Every seeking gets guided before-hand by what is sought” (p. 24). As Heidegger searches, so searches the advisor, “laying bare” the questions whose answers are sought, and searching for “that which is to be found out by the asking” (p. 24).

The phenomenological question plays a significant role in the advisor’s identity of place: “What is the lived experience of doing academic advising?” It encourages us to access memory and, yet, anticipate; we must encounter the past and envision the future presently. Heidegger (1959/1971) encourages us to unify these entities in order to recognize that “All distances in time and space are shrinking” (p. 163). Despite the length of time an academic advisor has been done with college him/herself, we must stay connected. Heidegger (1959/1971) asserts that it is the value of nearness that must be embraced, although it is a challenging task. “Nearness, it seems, cannot be encountered directly. We succeed in reaching it rather by attending to what is near” (p. 164). Certainly, the academic advisor finds the students’ experiences near, and through them identity is continually negotiated and fulfilled.

“We grasp eternal space through our bodily situation” (Merleau-Ponty, 1947/1964, p. 5).

Another possibility in the exploration of place within the realm of academic advising is the conceptual nature of active decision-making. There is a certain expectation within the identity of place that decisions will be made, and it is the response-ability of the advisors to prepare for that effort through the person and structure of their own experiences. Buber (1973) explores the nature of the dynamic interplay of one’s ‘being present with.’

He becomes aware of the other as one who relates to him out of his selfhood and to whom he relates out of his selfhood. By virtue of this characteristic reserved for him, man has not simply entered into being as one species among other species—only just so much more manifoldly endowed—but as a special sphere. For here, and within what we call world only here, does the meeting of the one with the other take place in full reality. . . .Only in man, however, does this interrelatedness transform itself and issue into the reality of meeting in which the one exists over against the other as his other, as one able in common presence at once to withstand him and confirm him. (Buber, 1973, p. 57)

The way in which advisors allow for decision-ing by students emerges as one of the uniquenesses for advisors. Each advisor approaches this with a different lens. Some advisors prefer to allow insight to emerge through conversation, others through experience, and still others through more indirect interactions. The “place-meant” of the individual within the phenomenon, the “nearness” to which advisors aspire, must emerge from the encounter of self and experience with self and understanding. As academic advisors, we experience this as a dual encounter, in and for ourselves and our students simultaneously.

Merleau-Ponty (1947/1964) provides a special insight into the nature of academic advising's pinnacle, that of perception:

The experience of perception is our presence at the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us; that perception . . . teaches us, outside all dogmatism, the true conditions of objectivity itself; that it summons us to the task of knowledge and action. (p. 25)

The concern here is that perhaps that experience of perception presumes knowledge, power, and the possession of “truth” that might not be a reality for all advisors and all students during all advising. We presume that we hold the keys to the building that students do in college, and that it is our responsibility to unlock the doors for our students. We sometimes believe that our capability for advising places us beyond where the students, regardless of age, find themselves. We may need to take a step back and remember that we want to help our students create, not create our students.

The role of perception for academic advisors is critical to their experience of the meaning of place. The advisor needs to understand the yin and yang of the advising relationship. Knowledge and action intertwine for those who already have been, who already have become, and it is sometimes difficult not to want to anticipate the journey for those who have yet to experience it. We need to let the sentences finish themselves, instead of rushing to complete them. We remind ourselves that experience is not something that can be lived for another, despite our best intentions. Each student and each academic advisor come to their experiences differently, and within a very different framework of knowledge and action. Advisors recognize this, and work to understand and accept that each encounter with students will be experienced differently, just as they acknowledge that each journey is unique.

It is a difficult undertaking to gauge another's response, openness, and availability to the questioning that emerges through the experience of advising. It means allowing for a new possibility of place, the focus on the new identity of each student as they transition from dependent/respondent son/daughter/child to developing/questioning/initiating and independent adult within the framework established for them to explore individual choice and decision-making. The role of advisor in the identity of place again becomes two-fold, facilitating the journey of another while coming to terms with one's own self-reflection.

The Meaning of Place: Heidegger's "Worlding"

Place situates . . . and it does so richly and diversely. (Casey, 1997, p. 201)

One of the ironies of phenomenological discussions is the contrast between Heidegger the philosopher and Heidegger the Nazi sympathizer and party member. This is a troubling connection, and numerous students of phenomenology have battled with the meaning behind Heidegger's membership and influence within Hitler's Nazi Party. I, however, do not have this internal struggle. As I read about Heidegger, I feel that I am in a position to forgive him such ideological indiscretions. As someone who is Jewish, I feel an inborn ability to forgive him his embrace of Nazi ideology. Perhaps it is because I think he embraced a political ideology and not a racist doctrine; perhaps it is because of his interactions with Hannah Arendt and Gertrud Jaspers that showed he certainly did not discriminate against Jews in his personal interactions. Perhaps it is because he contributes to my understanding of the world in a new way that I am able to separate this man's political ideology from his intellectual contributions. I claim his ideas for my own use, re-visioning his concepts

from my unique perspective, and for my own use. I can come to own his ideas, to use them to build my own basis of experience. Pragmatically, his notion of “worlding” implies that we are all in this experience together. The Nazi party did not exist in a vacuum. We all continue to struggle to make sense of the knowledge and understandings that emerge from our cultural encounter with “truth” as experienced in Hitler’s Germany in order to find meanings that “work.” The search for meaning continues even today through Bosnia, Rwanda and Sudan, and through blind eyes turned away from the light of genocide wherever it continues to exist. We are all in this experience together.

Heidegger’s (1962/1967) “worlding” is a particularly relevant concept for me in the phenomenological exploration of academic advising. Heidegger explores the experience of the lectern from the differing perspectives of student and teacher. He combines the experience of the two into one, transcending time in order to establish a relationship with the particular phenomenon we are about. Academic advising, too, asks us to consider the relationship of both student and advisor, and then combines the two into one in order to complete the relationship. Heidegger’s explorations invite us to wonder about the choices he made in determining his own path, his alliance with the Nazi party among those choices. We wonder about the authentic nature of phenomenological exploration, and speculate about the challenges it can withstand. Heidegger’s own faults allow us to acknowledge our own, and invite us to consider the divided nature of knowing and being.

Safransky (1998) tells us that Heidegger was:

. . . Fond of the grand gesture, and in consequence one can never be sure whether he is speaking of Western civilization or himself, whether Being as

such is being discussed or merely his own being. But if the principle is valid that philosophy springs not from thought but from mood, then ideas should be at home not only in skirmish with other ideas but also on the elevated plateau of tradition. . . . These evidently do not allow him to experience his own entry into the world as a gift or a promising arrival. It must have been a crash—that is what his mood demands. (p. 2)

Heidegger reminds us that we are human, and our mistakes are made as humans in order to learn and grow. As hard as we try, we do not have all the right answers, and often we have no answers at all. Heidegger's own fall from ethical grace in the eyes of many requires us to acknowledge that it is within the nature of humanity to make mistakes, and none among us is immune.

"Thinking does not bring about knowledge" argues Heidegger (1968/1993, p. 353). Therefore, it must be understanding that brings us to his wrestling with "being" and what it means "to be." As we hold self-determination over the form of "to-be" we wish to hold, we struggle to self-define our own meaning of place in the place where so many others dwell alongside us. Heidegger's exploration of "*wohnen*," to reside or stay, to be at peace, to be content "is related to words that mean to grow accustomed to, or feel at home in, a place" (1968/1993, p. 345). We work in creating the development of such a place, fostering an identity which entitles our wanderings amongst the many. We choose and do not choose equally, all resulting in decisions made. "Man's relation to locales, and through locales to spaces, inheres in his dwelling. The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, thought essentially" (Heidegger, 1959/1971, p. 159).

We search for meaning within each conversation between advisor and student, between advisor and other advisor. We search for the meaning of our place in the experience of others, and the meaning of the search for identity in which we actively

encourage others' engagement. We work to incorporate ourselves into the experiences of others, and then use them to help make sense of our own. We aim high, toward achievement of other, and work to fulfill goals which we have not established or defined.

In memory as in architecture, the things I *am with* help to constitute an ongoing "aura," an enveloping atmosphere, which surrounds me. The things of memory *remain with me*, within me. They occupy interior psychical places and are the determinative loci of my life. (Casey, 1993, p. 129)

The role of the advisor in helping to create a place of self-defining identity for students is essential to the ongoing search for the identity of place. Levin (1989) suggests that we are "responsible for creating social spaces in which the voices of truth can be heard; we are responsible for opening up social spaces in which truth can be spoken: spoken and not shouted, spoken without fear of punishment or reprisal, spoken without shame" (p. 137). Academic advisors spend hours, days, weeks, even years helping to define and redefine what truth *means*. Every student an advisor encounters will have a different understanding of truth, a different encounter with *the* truth, and different needs within the varying identities of truth that we seek to have them embrace. The truth emerges as its own entity within the advising relationship as students explore the nature of the relationship with their advisor, the advisor encounters the experience with the students, and both take time for self-reflection and emerging understanding. The question, then, that drives my phenomenological exploration is: **What is the lived experience of doing academic advising?** I turn now to the methodology I use for that exploration.

The Hermeneutic Process Embraced

Van Manen (2003) describes his phenomenological framework as “a set of methodological suggestions” (p. 1). His approach is to do things insightfully in order to create understanding and effect change. In order to research “human science,” van Manen (2003) identifies a “dynamic interplay among six research activities:”

(1) Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world; (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it; (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon; (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting; (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; and (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30-31)

He identifies fundamental existential themes such as life, death, being, otherness, meaning, and mystery as occurring in the phenomenological human science literature (van Manen, 2003). In order to separate such fundamental themes with more particular themes that phenomenology is concerned with, he established four “existentials,” four lifeworld themes as “guides for the reflective research process known as phenomenology” (van Manen, 2003, p. 101). Although we can’t always repeat or fully understand an experience, hermeneutic phenomenology brings us closer to identifying with one.

I have adopted his research activities for my own phenomenological investigation, embracing the “turning . . . the being-given-over to a quest” (van Manen, 2003, p. 31) in Chapter One for my deeper understanding of the lived experience of academic advisors. In searching for meaning through memory, and encountering thoughts, meanings, “knowings,” and understandings, I have

encountered what van Manen describes in his first component as reflective consciousness.

The second component in the phenomenological exploration is found in what is lived. Van Manen (2003) warns the phenomenological researcher that mere words cannot reveal the true nature of experience. Living the phenomenon deeply, through experience, reaches far beyond the scope of language. Subsequently, the embracement of a metaphor to try to encompass the nature of the lived experience, beyond the language we can use to describe it, is helpful in the unlayering process in which we are involved. I dwelt within the metaphor of building a house, allowing for the construction of relationships and the foundations for understandings to emerge through the metaphoric uncovering as I explored the meaning of the phenomenon further in Chapter Two, and which I will continue to do throughout my study.

The third component van Manen recommends in characterizing the phenomenon is to reflect on the essential themes which began in my exploration and continues as the study unfolds. Philosophical texts have the ability to re-mind the researcher, providing us insights left untouched in previous encounters. Such re-minding responds to our reflections and insights gained over time, and serves to re-collect memories long forgotten. Van Manen (2003) names four existentials that “form an intricate unity which we call the lifeworld—our lived world” (p. 105). He encourages us to “inquire into the nature of the lived space that renders that particular experience its quality of meaning” (van Manen, 2003, p. 103). As advisors seek their role in the search for “place,” van Manen’s reflection of exploring lived experience allows entry into the philosophical nature of “inquiring into the ways we experience

the affairs of our day to day existence” (p. 103).

Van Manen’s (2003) first existential is that of lived space (spatiality), defined as “felt space . . . which affects the way we feel” (p. 102). The adoption of the metaphor of building a house for the phenomenological exploration has already established the fundamental nature of space and place within the lived experience of academic advisors. “The home reserves a very special space experience which has something to do with the fundamental sense of our being. . . . Home is where we can go and *be* what we *are*” (p. 102). The advisors’ quests to create safe, secure space for their advising relationships focus on allowing students to gain insight into what has meaning for them, encouraging them to explore that which they wish to discover about themselves.

Van Manen (2003) continues the exploration with the second fundamental existential, that of the “lived body (corporeality),” the phenomenological dwelling that places us bodily in the world. “In our physical presence we both reveal something about ourselves and we conceal something at the same time . . . sometimes in spite of ourselves” (p. 102). It is this concealing that advisors encounter and attempt to un-cover within every meeting. Communication scholars Ting-Toomey and Chung (2004) establish the concept of “Face . . . a claimed sense of social self-worth that a person wants others to have of her or him” (p. 193). “Face” is the maintaining of poise and control in conversations for the sake of others, and is focused on how others might perceive us. Ting-Toomey and Chung (2004) explain that our need to spend a lot of time engaging with others in either maintaining our own “face” or allowing others to maintain theirs is an ideal touchstone for academic

advising relationships. We spend a lot of time trying to let our students be present with us in a way that is not threatening, in a way that allows them to succeed and to fail, to explore and to recover, in a “safe” way, in a way that encourages and supports, while sometimes also needing to challenge and confront. Our desire to affect the person the student represents in a bodily way often transcends into advising conversations, as barriers built long-ago sometimes need a physical tearing down to progress. I wrote of keeping tissues handy in my office in Chapter One. There is certainly a very real lived body experience within the academic advisor’s encounterings.

Van Manen’s third existential is lived time (temporality). It is a subjective concept of time, suggesting that

Time appears to speed up when we enjoy ourselves, or slow down when we feel bored or when we are anxious. . . . It is also our way of being in the world . . . open to a beckoning future . . . or recollecting the past. The temporal dimensions of past, present, and future constitute the horizons of a person’s temporal landscape. (van Manen, 2003, p. 104)

It is not unusual for academic advisors to mark time through a different lens than most individuals. We tend to focus on academic calendars, registration dates, and graduation. It is common for us to measure four years in the blink of an eye, through 7-8 meetings with a student. I often say “How did it get to be spring break already?” “I can’t believe you’re ready to graduate!” “Have I really been on campus 15 years?” Time flies when you are having fun, and apparently, when you work as an academic advisor. We mark time in terms of drop-add periods and deadline, in terms of semesters, not days or weeks, or even months, and as van Manen (2003) reminds us, “The past changes under the pressures and influences of the present . . . the past

changes itself, because we live toward a future we already see taking shape” (p. 104). Academic advising requires that advisors start looking to the future as soon as a first year student comes for orientation the summer before classes even begin. We give the new students guidelines and expectations, we establish four-year plans to let students “graduate on time,” and we encourage students to take summer and winter term classes to “stay on track.” We reflect the future by focusing on when the student will leave our university from the outset. There is no discussion of a permanent dwelling—there is no expectation that staying put is a goal for advising students.

The fourth existential is that of the lived other (relationality), “the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them” (van Manen, 2003, p. 104). Again, the advising relationships established within our encounters often transcend the simple discussion about which classes to take the following semester. There is a certain expectation of availability by the student to which the “good” academic advisor responds. The ability to “transcend our *selves*” (van Manen, 2003, p. 105) invites conversation and meaning, and hopefully meaningful conversation, and is the fundamental reinforcement advisors receive from their students. As the lived experience of advising is examined, these existentials will weave in and out of the themes named.

Establishing Common Foundations

Following my own consideration of the nature of the lived experience of doing academic advising, I sought to engage in conversations with other individuals who are professional academic advisors in order to continue my phenomenological exploration. Through my own professional experiences and references from

colleagues, I wanted to identify a group of individuals interested in engaging in conversations with others who share and live the experience of advising college students.

Van Manen (2003) reminds us that:

The point of phenomenological research is to “borrow” other people’s experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience. . . . *We gather other people’s experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves* . . . they allow us to become “in-formed,” shaped or enriched by this experience so as to be able to render the full significance of its meaning. (p. 62)

Selecting the Supports

During June and July, 2005, I telephoned eight professional academic advisors at the large state university where I am employed and spoke with a ninth advisor in person in order to discover who might participate with me in my study. I chose to engage in conversations with individuals who work on my campus because of the unique nature of academic advising here, which divides academic advising according to each individual college and department, and which has dedicated advising for students who are undecided and who demonstrate interests in various pre-professional curricula. I wanted to explore the lived experiences of other academic advisors in order to understand the relationships that we establish with our students through our engagement with them. Since we meet such a wide variety of students, and yet still feel the same calling, I was interested in coming to understand the journeys that other advisors have taken with their students.

Through those initial conversations, I was able to identify six advisors who would join me on this journey, and who represented different advising perspectives,

different levels of experience, and different gender, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. After one of these identified advisors failed to answer my follow up phone calls or emails despite her initial willingness to participate, I decided to move forward with five advisors.

Each of the conversants was a full-time employee of the university with a primary responsibility and oversight for academic advising. In my selection of conversants, I sought individuals who had many “initial encounters” and ongoing interactions with students as a part of their daily work experience. I sought advisors who worked with students for more than just one year, trying to understand how relationships develop between students and academic advisors over time. In choosing my “neighbors,” I was sensitive to their work environment (i.e., what types of students they work with), the length of their full time experience working with students in an advising capacity, and their departmental affiliations. Three of the advisors were departmental advisors, affiliated with specific academic departments, and two of the advisors worked for a division that advises undecided students within the university. I was also sensitive to gender, race, and other cultural identifiers (i.e. sexual orientation and native culture). Since they all worked for a large state university, they understood the nature of the ebb and flow of the academic seasons of students and their experiences with academic advising. (See Appendix A for the invitational letter each participant received explaining the nature of the study.)

Dwelling in the Neighborhood

When I initially contacted my conversants, I explained that there would be two individual conversations and one group conversation over the course of the fall,

2005 semester. I also told them that I would be asking them to complete two sets of written reflections to complement our in-person conversations. Since I work as a member of the community I was researching, it was relatively easy to coordinate our schedules since we all have the same “busy” times, and I also knew when the conversants were more likely to have “down time” and time to reflect on their experiences of doing academic advising.

My conversants and I met in person three times between August and December, 2005. We met for an individual conversation in September, a group conversation in October, and then another individual conversation in December. After these “official” meetings were completed, we also met for an informal, and untaped, lunch as a group in January, 2006. After both individual conversations, the conversants were also asked to respond to some prompts I provided to them in the form of written reflections. I was interested in exploring these written reflections in addition to our in-person conversations as the conversants were able to delve more deeply into the nature of their experiences. I hoped that they would be able to reflect on their encounters with students in a more detailed and thoughtful way than during a verbal conversation which expects a more immediate response. It also allowed the conversants to “write into” their own experiences of doing academic advising, enabling them to explore further their own understandings of themselves and their students.

Each of the two individual conversations ranged between 45-60 minutes and was held in the advisors’ individual offices. I have written about having been reflective of my own space for advising, and I was curious about the place of others

in their own interactions with students. Meeting in their individual offices allowed for interesting insights into their own “place” of advising, the “space” in which they encounter students and create relationships. The 90-minute group conversation took place over breakfast in a conference room in my building. Throughout the conversational process for both individual meetings and the group interaction, I guided our conversations through a series of questions designed to explore the nature of doing academic advising.

For our first individual conversation, I arranged to meet each conversant and scheduled an hour of time with them. I explained the purpose of the meeting again, gave them a copy of the Consent Form (see Appendix B), and told them they could mail it back to me when they had the chance to review it. I also explained that I would be audio-taping the conversations, and transcribing them for use in my research. Four of the five advisors signed the Consent Form prior to starting the conversation, and the fifth advisor mailed it to me within one week of our conversation.

For the first conversation, I asked each conversant if they were familiar with the phenomenological method of inquiry, and although they had each heard of this method of qualitative inquiry, none of them were very familiar with it. I then provided a brief explanation of the phenomenological approach to researching lived experience, and explained the nature of “turning” toward a question, in this case, the lived experience of doing academic advising. Finally, before we started the conversation, I explained that I would be posing some questions for them to consider, and that we would have a conversation around those questions. I explained that there

were no “right” or “wrong” answers, and that I was interested in hearing about their unique advising experiences. I then used the following questions as a guide to draw out the nature of the lived experience for doing academic advising:

- What is your experience of academic advising? What does it mean to you to be an academic advisor?
- What is your experience of exploring choices with students?
- In what ways do you seek to establish relationships with students during your advising sessions?
- As you look around your office, your “place,” what does it say about you? What does it invite students to “know” about you? Are your choices about this “place” conscious?
- What experience(s) do you want students to have during an advising relationship? What steps do you take to foster that relationship?
- Do your experiences with students reflect your own advising experiences during college?
- What tenets of the advising relationship are central to your experience as an advisor?

After the first conversation, I waited about a month before scheduling the group meeting. While four of the advisors and I met on the date and time scheduled for the group conversation, the fifth member did not show up. After waiting for her for fifteen minutes, I called her and she told me she was not able to attend. I decided to proceed without her. After the group conversation, I followed up via email and phone with the missing member of the group several times, and never received a return response. I worried greatly about the implications about losing a voice of the group, this one being one of the younger and more culturally diverse voices among my community. However, despite her failure to complete the series of conversations, I chose to include the fifth member’s voice in my thematizing in Chapter Four, albeit limited, since she did participate in a first conversation and provided a first reflection. I found that her voice was an important one from a young professional woman of

color, who brought a particular perspective to important conversations we engage in with our students and among ourselves.

During our group conversation, we each shared our individual journeys to the positions we now hold. We found a great diversity of backgrounds and personal experiences that led us to common roles as advisors. Each advisor was able to share his/her own journey, going as far back in personal history as desired. They traced their often-wandering trails to their positions as academic advisors today. After the advisors shared their individual experiences, we were able to reflect as a group on the journey, asking questions and creating conversations about the nature of our shared lived experiences.

Following this group conversation, I waited about six weeks, until after our busy registration period, before scheduling the final individual meetings. For the second individual conversation, I asked them to reflect on their “best” and “worst” academic advising experiences. They reflected on their favorite students, and the students they really struggled to advise. I asked them to be thoughtful about what makes a “good” or a “bad” advising experience, and what makes an advising session “successful” or “unsuccessful.”

Following each conversation, I transcribed the tapes of the conversations. None of the conversants asked to review the tapes at any time during (or after) the conversational process. This approach to transcription was helpful in allowing me to identify themes that developed. These themes gave rise to questions I posed in ensuing conversations.

In addition to our in-person conversations, I also asked the conversants to explore the nature of their lived experiences through written reflective journals. Van Manen's (2003) suggestions served as a guide for the lived-experience reflections in which the conversants engaged.

(1) You need to describe the experience as you live(d) through it. Avoid as much as possible causal explanations, generalizations, or abstract interpretations. (2) Describe the experience from the insider, as it were; almost like a state of mind; the feelings, the mood, the emotions, etc. (3) Focus on a particular example or incident of the object of experience: describe specific events, an adventure, a happening, a particular experience. (4) Try to focus on an example of the experience which stands out for its vividness, or as it was the first time. (5) Attend to how the body feels, how things smell(ed), how they sound(ed), etc. (6) Avoid trying to beautify your account with fancy phrases of flowery terminology. (van Manen, 2003, pp. 64-65)

As a result of these suggestions, I posed the following questions for the first set of reflections:

- In what ways do you come to understand yourself through your experiences with students?
- What is an experience of success being an academic advisor? Of failure?
- In what ways do you give to students and in what ways do you receive from them?

The second set of written reflections was an open-ended consideration focusing on the conversants' recollections of their "favorite" and "least favorite" advising experiences. I did not respond to either set of the written reflections in writing, although I was able to draw upon examples the conversants provided in preparing questions for our group and second individual meetings. Both the transcribed conversations and the written reflections became part of the text for interpretation in Chapter Four.

In January, 2006, after the conversations were completed, I treated the group to an informal lunch at a campus restaurant, and the relationships that had been

forged through the shared experience of conversation surrounding the phenomenon of academic advising were apparent. The series of conversations found that we have much in common, even within very different advising contexts and approaches.

Reframing the “Place” We Are Building

When beginning the pedagogical process I used to engage with others encountering the phenomenon of academic advising, I needed to be mindful of the nature of “building as creating,” the idea that “every building is born in the mind of its creator” (Lawlor, 1994, p. 3). In my conversations with other advisors, the individual stamp of the “creator,” the create-ive voices of other advisors, can be heard through different experiences and understandings.

A piece of architecture grows from the desire to shape the world around us in ways that support our needs and dreams. We project our desires, which have no material shape or mass, into the material environment . . . By receiving and reflecting the information we feed into them, building elements become repositories for our thoughts and feelings. They hold and nurture the psychological energy that animates our ways of living. (Lawlor, 1994, pp. 4, 9)

In my conversations, I sought out the inward and outward expressions of the “receiving and reflecting” nature of the information we share with our students. In so doing, I was able to reflect on my own understandings of the experience of sharing, and was able to consider the underpinnings of van Manen’s (2003) call to “know” and “be” in the world in a certain way in order to more fully “become the world” (p. 5).

For me, the process of exploring academic advising from the phenomenological point of view, of sitting in the presence of and in the process with other advisors, allowed van Manen’s exploration of “intentionality” to shine through. By using phenomenological questioning to explore the lived experiences of other

academic advisors, and discovering their advising “secrets and intimacies,” I have been able to “bring the world as world into being” (van Manen, 2003, p. 5) for myself, as well as others.

Bricks and Mortar: Engaging the Methodology

Van Manen suggests that the “dynamic interplay” making up the six research activities that form the foundation of hermeneutic phenomenological research allows us to understand better how to pursue “human science research” (van Manen, 2003, p. 30). It is challenging since he also suggests that, according to Gadamer and Rorty, there “is no method” for doing this research (van Manen, pp. 29-30). Subsequently, the goal becomes not the prescription of “a mechanistic set of procedures, but to animate inventiveness and stimulate insight” (van Manen, p. 30).

Turning to a Phenomenon Which Seriously Interests Us and Commits Us to the World

Things turn fuzzy just when they seemed to become so clear. To do a phenomenological study of any topic, therefore, it is not enough to simply recall experiences I or others may have had with respect to a particular phenomenon. Instead I must recall the experience in such a way that the essential aspects, the meaning structures of this experience as lived through, are brought back, as it were, and in such a way that we recognize this description *as a possible experience*, which means *as a possible interpretation* of that experience. (van Manen, 2003, p. 41)

In choosing to explore the nature of academic advising as the phenomenon to be considered, I chose something that, in effect, chose me. The nature and experience of academic advising came to me purely by accident, and it is something which has developed over time into a calling. As van Manen (2003) explains, “When one orients to a phenomenon one is approaching the experience with a certain interest” (p. 40). My orientation to academic advising allows me to explore “the question of what

something is ‘really’ like” (van Manen, p. 42). My orientation to academic advising reminds me to “be steadfastly oriented to the lived experience that makes it possible to ask the ‘what it is like’ question in the first place” (van Manen, p. 42). The “falling into” of my phenomenon led me through the initial exploration of the experience of doing academic advising in Chapter One as I wondered what led others to inhabit their own roles.

Chapter Two opens up the phenomenon further as I drew upon other sources for this existential investigation. The philosophical writings about the nature and the search for “place,” for both the academic advisor and the students with whom they work, allows for continued understandings of the nature of this grounding. It also allows for my exploration of the experiences of other academic advisors, and their own search for, and creation of, place.

Investigating Experience as We Live It Rather Than as We Conceptualize It

To make a study of the lived experience of parenting or teaching, one needs to orient oneself in a strong way to the question of the meaning of parenting or teaching. Nothing about the notion of pedagogy should be considered “given” or “granted;” only that the meaning of pedagogy needs to be *found* in the experience of pedagogy, because the lived experience of pedagogy is all that remains if pre-suppositions are suspended. (van Manen, 2003, p. 52)

The inherent nature of incorporating personal experiences into the exploration of hermeneutic phenomenology is very present throughout this research. After all, “The ego-logical starting point for phenomenological research is a natural consequence” (van Manen, 2003, p. 54) of my own experience. It is reassuring to know that “One’s own experiences are also the possible experiences of others” (van Manen, p. 54). It reinforces one’s own choices to be able to engage in the phenomenon with others, and “It is to the extent that *my* experiences could be *our*

experiences that the phenomenologist wants to be reflectively aware of certain experiential meanings” (van Manen, p. 57).

As I engaged in my research with other academic advisors, I continued reflecting on my own experiences with students, trying to live in my own experiences as I asked others to live in theirs. During this process, I am reminded of Levin’s re-visioning of being present with others:

There are many different ways for us to relate to, or be ‘with,’ people and things, and be ‘in’ the situations of our lives. . . . We sometimes encounter people and things, and enter into situations, with great openness, eager to enjoy a fresh experience; at other times, we tend to encounter people and things, and enter into situations, with closed minds and deaf ears. . . . We can hear only what we want to hear, or what we already know and believe; we can hear nothing different, nothing new . . . there are some things we *need* to hear, but we are also too afraid to listen. (Levin, 1989, pp. 18-19)

It is a good re-minder that we need to be present with and for each student and for each meeting. We cannot live in the experience of a meeting held earlier that day, or worried about one yet to come. We cannot be afraid of forgetting, of asking for a re-minder, when we encounter students. We have to live in this moment, not in memories of past meetings in order to be attentive to the needs of our students. We meet them where they are today, not where they were last week, last month, or last semester. Levin (1989) reminds us that our journey must begin in the here and now, and can thus encourage us along the way toward creating future relationships.

The conversations with my conversants also re-mind me that the journey is the most important focus for the advising relationship. “Asking opens up possibilities of meaning” (Gadamer, 1975/2000, p. 338), but it is important that the advisor be open to the answering, as well.

Exploring My Phenomenon Through An Opening From Within

We gather other people's experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves. (van Manen, 2003, p. 62)

In seeking to open up the lived experience of doing academic advising, in Chapter Two, I drew upon various textual sources to guide my turning toward my phenomenon. By exploring the etymologies of various terms associated with creating and building, I was able to open up some of the foundational concepts that advisors experience in their relationships with their students. In exploring these terms more deeply, I was able to embrace more fully the metaphor of building a house as I encountered my phenomenon. I re-thought the nature of the building blocks and the foundations that we provide as academic advisors during the process of doing academic advising. I also reconsidered the nature of the experience of building the house, and explored the importance of reflecting “home” from the perspective of those who seek to house themselves as well as their students. I continued my re-orienting “as a means of being led by the phenomenon through a way of access genuinely belonging to it . . .” and “. . . along *with* it, a certain understanding of what fullness of being is” (Palmer, 1969, pp. 128-129).

Having some preliminary conversations surrounding the experiences of academic advising also enabled me to build on these understandings as I turned further toward opening up my phenomenon. Asking others to name their own experiences allowed even greater insight into the nature of the phenomenon of doing academic advising. It also allowed for an initial encounter of the phenomenon from an “outside” perspective, and enabled me to understand the dynamic nature of exploring lived experiences from various individual perspectives.

An exploration of the academic literature available about the experience of academic advising revealed that there is a real need for consideration about the nature of actually “doing” academic advising. The research literature has a lot of “how to” do academic advising, and explores the necessary relationships between academic advisors and the administration, but there is a dearth of information exploring the nature of doing academic advising from the advisor’s perspective. Even where some literature examines the varying (and numerous) needs of the students with whom we work, there is little consideration given to the nature of creating and maintaining those relationships, beyond recognizing that it is important to do so.

The thematizing in Chapter Four continues the uncovering of the lived experience of doing academic advising. These explorations move beyond the conceptual and into the actual. They enable real conversation about the nature of doing and being, rather than becoming mired in that which “might” or “could” be.

Reflecting on the Essential Themes Which Characterize the Phenomenon

As van Manen (2003) reminds us, “Phenomenological reflection is both easy and difficult” (p. 77). As academic advisors, we are relatively easily defined by our job titles. There is no real ambiguity in the expectations that we have about our daily role, and it is also clear to our students, for the most part, what to expect in a meeting with us. I did refer in Chapter One to one of the challenges that sometimes emerges when students ask to meet with, or believe they are meeting with, a “counselor.” Academic advisors quickly move to correct that notion, as would the people who are the “real” counselors. No, academic advisors are pretty easily defined. It is how that

definition is applied that becomes the difficult part, the struggle with the “reflective determination and explication” (van Manen, p. 77) of what an academic advisor “is.”

The process of seeking the themes that emerge from self- and other-definition forms the basis of our attempts to explicate the reality of our experiences. We “desire to make meaning,” and so we “are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience” (van Manen, 2003, p. 79). Van Manen again provides a foundation for my search for phenomenological themes in my conversations with my conversants. He encourages the phenomenological researcher to come to understand how themes emerge, how they “come about.” He introduces the following statements about the phenomenological qualities of the “experience of themes as emerging lived meanings in life:”

(1) Theme is the needfulness of desire to make sense; (2) Theme is the sense we are able to make of something; (3) Theme is the openness to something; (4) Theme is the process of insightful invention, discovery, disclosure of meaning. (van Manen, 2003, p. 88)

It is, then, essential to relate the themes that are identified to the phenomenon that is being studied:

(1) Theme is the means to get at the notion; (2) Theme gives shape to the shapeless; (3) Theme describes the content of the notion; (4) Theme is always a reduction of a notion. (van Manen, 2003, p. 88)

This understanding allows us to uncover the role of themes in the phenomenological process. We understand that:

. . . No conceptual formulation or single statement that can possibly capture the full mystery of this experience. . . . As such, a so-called thematic phrase does not do justice to the life of the phenomenon . . . [it] only serves to point at, to allude to, or to hint at, an aspect of the phenomenon. (van Manen, 2003, p. 92)

Through the process of studying the lived-experience descriptions and identifying the essential themes that began to emerge, I started to seek out the commonalities throughout the reflections and conversations that took place, these themes being the basis of Chapter Four. Van Manen warns that it is important at this juncture to take a step back and work to determine which themes are truly essential, or universal, and which themes simply work to illuminate the phenomenon being studied. *“In determining the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to discover aspects of qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is”* (van Manen, 2003, p. 107).

Van Manen (2003) reminds us that we must make sure to determine whether a theme we believe we encounter in the phenomenon actually belongs there. He suggests that the phenomenologist should attempt to identify the essential themes by asking “Is this phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or delete this theme from the phenomenon? Does the phenomenon without this theme lose its fundamental meaning?” (van Manen, p. 107).

In order to determine this essential nature of the themes that emerge through my conversations, I again turn toward van Manen’s suggestions for identifying themes. He asserts that thematizing is a “tool for getting at the meaning of the experience” (van Manen, 2003, p. 88). The process of exploring and identifying themes can be undertaken through three different approaches: The “wholistic approach,” whereby we try to identify a single phrase which can enlighten the text as a whole; the “selective reading approach,” which calls for the phenomenologist to identify specific phrases which seem especially relevant to illuminating the whole

text; and the “line-by-line approach,” where the researcher looks at each line in the text and tries to determine what it contributes to our understanding of the larger whole (van Manen, pp. 92-93).

For my own research, I adopted both the wholistic approach and the line-by-line approach for my thematizing in Chapter Four. Some of the themes emerged immediately, but others emerged only by carefully looking at the text in the transcripts line by line. With this consideration in mind, in my follow-up conversations I was able to explore the initial emerging themes with the study conversants, where we collectively reflected on the nature and meaning of the emergent themes. I then worked to identify the essential/universal themes, as well as the phenomenon-dependent themes, in an effort to further illuminate the various spaces found within this phenomenological house.

Describing the Phenomenon Through the Art of Writing and Rewriting

Van Manen informs our need to “write into” any phenomenological experience. “What form of writing is needed to do justice to the fullness of pedagogy and pedagogic experience?” (van Manen, 2003, p. 111). Since “human science meaning can only be communicated textually” (van Manen, p. 78), it becomes the human science researcher’s responsibility, and obligation, to seek out the core of meaning and understanding through written language and context.

Van Manen (2003) suggests that “Phenomenology has been called a method without techniques” (p. 131). However, to explore a phenomenon from a phenomenological perspective, it requires a going back and forth, a thinking and a re-thinking, a “re-flecting, re-cognizing” (van Manen, p. 131) in order to create an in-

depth understanding, and a thoughtful reflection. Van Manen considers it to be a “depthful writing [which] cannot be established in one straightforward process” (p. 131). We must approach it repeatedly, going back and forth between individual parts and the whole, to arrive at what will ultimately come to be the “personal signature of the author” (van Manen, p. 132).

Through my own process of writing and rewriting, I endeavored to create a narrative that involves the reader, and allows insight into a world in which readers may not share. I attempted to illuminate the “dark places” that exist for advisors, our failures, our lack of connection with some students, our frustrations with those who seemingly refuse to help themselves. I also dwell for a time within our light, our presence with students who continue to return for help, who make us feel we are contributing, and remind us that we are making a difference. The struggle to explain, the desire to make sure the reader understands, to ensure that the reader “gets it,” guides my “writing into.” As Gadamer (1975/2000) reminds us, “Thus written texts present the real hermeneutical task . . . It is not really a relationship between persons, between the reader and the author, but about sharing in what the text shares with us” (pp. 392-393).

At the beginning of my own exploration, I asked the conversants to choose a pseudonym for the journey into their own lived experiences. I then assigned pseudonyms to all the students referred to by name throughout our conversations. Much of our conversation was based on anecdotes provided by my conversants. As van Manen (2003) suggests:

The significance of anecdotal narrative in phenomenological research and writing is situated in its power: (1) to compel: a story that recruits our willing

attention; (2) to lead us to reflect: a story tends to invite us to a reflective search for significance; (3) to involve us personally: one tends to search actively for the story teller's meaning via one's own; (4) to transform: we may be touched, shaken, moved by story; it teaches us; (5) to measure one's interpretive sense: one's response to a story is a measure of one's deepened ability to make interpretive sense. . . . If done well, [anecdotes] will create a tension between the pre-reflective and reflective pulls of language. (p. 121)

The anecdotes which emerged in conversation with my conversants allowed greater insights concerning their lived experiences. They “can be understood as a methodological device in human science to make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us” (van Manen, 2003, p. 116). As my conversants and I discussed our desires and our abilities to remember our advising experiences, I found that such remembrances are often based in the specific stories we were able to tell about various students with whom we have shared our time. We tend to remember the “good” and the “bad” through such individual encounters, and these anecdotes truly allow access into “teachings that are never written down” (van Manen, p. 119).

Using writing as my primary method for exploring my phenomenon which was further opened up through my conversations, I have tried to create a text which draws the reader into the lived experience of doing academic advising. This process of writing and re-writing allows the “application of logos (language and thoughtfulness) to a phenomenon (an aspect of lived experience), to what shows itself precisely as it shows itself” (van Manen, 2003, p. 33).

Maintaining a Strong and Oriented Pedagogical Relation

The concept of pedagogy is like identifying talent; one knows it when one sees it. Educators embrace the notion of pedagogy, but it is difficult to identify until we see or experience it. The whole-hearted embracement of the *concept* of pedagogy

runs the risk of missing the *reality* of it as we wait for labels, and “proof” that something works. Van Manen (2003) asserts that pedagogy has become something that we must “have” or “possess,” like a skill set for how to be a good teacher, or a good parent. “Rather, pedagogy is something that a parent or teacher continuously must redeem, retrieve, regain, recapture in the sense of recalling” (p. 149). It gives a very different meaning, indeed a different feeling, to the concept of pedagogy. It becomes something I must seek to inhabit, to encounter in a complete and comprehensive way. I cannot just check the box in order to “maintain” my orientation. I must continue to engage, and encounter.

Van Manen (2003) identifies four conditions for allowing our text to be “oriented, strong, rich, and deep” (p. 151). These conditions guide the interpretive process.

Our text needs to be oriented. It needs to answer the question of how the researcher experiences, observes, listens, and relates to the phenomenon. We are both researchers and pedagogues, and we must embrace our role of becoming “oriented to the world in a pedagogic way” (van Manen, 2003, p. 151).

Our text needs to be strong. We must always attempt to reach the strongest possible pedagogic interpretation of our phenomenon. We endeavor to teach, to serve as a resource for others in our field of practice and being. We try to establish independent and universal meaning for our research goals, which allow the field to move forward, apart from a consideration of our specific phenomenon. It should allow all practitioners insight into the lived experience of those who encounter students.

Our text needs to be rich. It is important to focus on a “rich and thick description,” that moves us beyond the researcher’s individual and immediate experience. “Epistemological considerations translate into an interest in the anecdotal, story, narrative, or phenomenological description” (van Manen, 2003, p. 152).

Our text needs to be deep. Depth is what gives the phenomenological experience its meaning. It encourages, if not requires, us to reach for something beyond where we are, what we are, and how we are. It embraces our experience of the present with “a vision of what should be” (van Manen, 2003, pp. 152-153). It emerges unencumbered by the bounds of the actual text, and allows the focus of the phenomenological description to find their own voice, and to have the voice emerge to show what it teaches us.

This was a challenging focus for my own phenomenological journey. It is difficult not to get caught up in the specifics, and to re-mind myself of the need to move on, over, and beyond the stories of the students. The other advisors I worked with also tend to base their understandings and awarenesses in the actual day-to-day of the experience, the “doing,” rather than the reflective nature of the phenomenon. Through the struggle, however, emerges an ever greater understanding of the experience. It moved me forward toward being able to “meet with it, go through it, encounter it, suffer it, consume it and, as well, be consumed by it” in order to produce a “theory of the unique” (van Manen, 2003, pp. 153, 156).

Balancing the Research Context by Considering Parts and Whole

Throughout this journey, I have considered the phenomenon of the lived experience of academic advisors at a large state university. Through conversations,

written narratives, and self-reflections, I have searched for connections to the universal nature of this phenomenon. The “call” to help, to care, to embody strength, to provide support, is the universal calling of this phenomenon called academic advising.

This process of exploration was not expected, and to my knowledge, did not cause any “discomfort, anxiety, false hope, guilt, self-doubt, or irresponsibility” (van Manen, 2003, p. 162) in the conversants. However, I do believe the experience of our conversations and the written reflections did create some new levels of self-awareness that led some of the conversants to vocalize their desire to move on, and to reflect that it might be time for a change. At one point in our group conversation I even joked that as a result of this process all of my conversants were going to quit their jobs. Ultimately, of course, this process is a reflective one, one in which people can express their “secrets” and be safe. I believe that emerged throughout my interactions with my conversants.

Additionally, as van Manen (2003) suggests will happen, this study has had a profound effect on me, personally, as I conducted this research and engaged with my phenomenon. I am so much more reflective as a result of the experience, and more attuned to the nuances of my own behaviors with my students and other advisors. The experience also created a stronger bond between my conversants and myself, as we shared some very personal accounts with each other. It allowed individual failures and triumphs to become shared by the group, as we joined together for our steps into the new structure that has been created for our dwelling. Ultimately, the end of

phenomenological research is to make things better for those affected by the insights brought about from the study—the pedagogical interest. Chapter Five addresses this.

In Chapter Four, I explore the nature of the advisor experience through conversations with five other advisors. Throughout the experience, my conversations assisted my continued search for shared essential meaning, and for the universality of experience that informs our meaning-full-ness as academic advisors.

CHAPTER FOUR: BUILDING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Home is the place where the world and I meet. It is not isolated from the outside, nor impermeable to it, but neither is it indiscriminately open. There are walls and a roof, but also doors and windows, and nowadays other portals: plumbing, electric and telephone lines. I invite people into my home, but not just anybody. I choose who and what to let in, and also what goes out. My guests leave with selected impressions; I do not show them everything.

Similarly the contents of my home are selected. I bring in furniture, equipment, supplies, and decorations, and arrange and modify them to suit my needs and tastes. A hotel room is not home, though it may have the basic necessities, because its contents have not undergone this transforming process. (Wertenbaker, 2006, p. 42)

An initial consideration of the process of building a house, the foundation of the metaphor I have adopted in my exploration of the lived experience of doing academic advising, finds an interesting contradiction. Some might presume the process of building a house to be a left-brained activity that is focused on detail, based on a logical and sequential decision-making process, and employing rational, analytical, and objective elements. There is a careful design, an establishment of precise measurements and applications made up of minute details intended to address every possible contingency. Others view it in the complete opposite manner, finding that the experience is rather random and intuitive, is based in holistic assumptions, and is a synthesizing experience relying on subjective opinion and impulsive decision-making. There is an unmistakable creativity in considering the shape of the living room and the placement of the furniture, in choosing the carpet colors and the kitchen flooring and the bathroom cabinets. Ultimately, it would seem that the successful building of a house requires a combination of both to reflect the reality of the existence of the house and the identity of the homebuilder who dwells within. After all, the dream of creating “That spot where security and privacy are supreme is

the desire of every man and woman. To make that spot—one's home—peculiarly a part of the personalities who live in it, is that touchstone" (Townsend & Dalzell, 1942/1958, p. v) upon which such dreams are based.

The experience of doing academic advising, too, is often based on an interesting contradiction. While the goal of the profession is to "look seriously at ways in which [advisors] could better serve, satisfy, and retain the students who enrolled" (Habley, 2000, p. 35), the reality is that "training, evaluation, recognition, and reward have been, and continue to be, the weakest links in academic advising" (p. 42). Advisors are asked to use both sides of the brain, to be detailed and deliberate, and to be sensitive and insightful. It is a call to awareness, both for themselves and for their students, as advisors are challenged by both breadth and depth of expectations for their roles.

Additionally, there is no real departmental major in college that prepares one to become an academic advisor. Although there is a student affairs curriculum at the graduate level, there is no direct path to becoming an academic advisor, no plan that one follows. In many ways, it is a true calling, a new building that we were not even aware was in place as our own journeys became our roles.

In the creation of such journeys toward our future roles as academic advisors, we are sensitive to the fact that every student's own academic road has the potential to wander, taking interesting twists and turns, like ours did. We want to encourage students to explore various paths toward self-fulfillment, paths that might not result in a marketing position or law school. We encounter our own futures at the same time that we are helping our students to prepare for theirs, and recognize that the

intersection of our paths, although not planned, lends itself to a deeper connection between advisor and student.

My conversations with five advisors guide me in exploring the nature of the lived experience of doing academic advising, their experiences opening up the foundations of the phenomenon. Each story, each shared remembrance, becomes another brick in the house we create with our students, our journeys helping them to create theirs. Ultimately, it is our unique ability to reflect our own sense of “home” that helps our students identify their place within the structure, and which creates the insights we look toward in order to create shared meaning.

Meet the Builders

Those who dwell within the profession of academic advising for any length of time will quickly feel pulled between expectation and reality. A colleague related that once during a conversation at an office retreat the director asked what would help improve the morale of the office. “More money” was the response. “Well, you picked the wrong job for that” replied the director. Academic advisors all joke that we do not do it for the money. What then? What drives us to build and create a four year reality for students? What feeds our senses of pride and accomplishment? Each academic advisor brings a unique perspective and a very individual voice to the answers to these questions, answers which developed through the building of their own academic houses and their own creation of home. Their perspectives help to uncover that which is still hidden beneath the weight of unturned earth, that which waits to contribute to another’s structure.

What insights can be uncovered about the nature of those who engage in the process of academic advising? What themes emerge as their thoughts and journeys are explored deeply? As I engage with the individual experiences of my conversants, I write toward my own uncovering of the phenomenon of doing academic advising.

Van Manen (2003) suggests that “To write is to show something . . . [that] phenomenological text succeeds when it lets us see that which shines through, that which tends to hide itself” (p. 130). My writing began to encircle the phenomenon, uncovering it from the various angles and perspectives which were given voice by my conversants. Ultimately, we find the “authentic speaker must be the true listener . . . able to listen to the way things of the world speak to us” (van Manen, 2003, p. 111). Through conversations with me, these advisors who work within a large state university with students of all different backgrounds and abilities explore the lived experience of doing academic advising. Their coming to understanding, their essence of both doing and being is revealed, as the true nature of our exploration emerges.

The Builder as Facilitator

There is a marvelous story of a man who once stood before God, his heart breaking from the pain and injustice in the world. “Dear God,” he cried out, “look at all the suffering, the anguish and distress in your world. Why don’t you send help?”

God responded, “I did send help. I sent you.” (Wolpe, 1995, p. 43)

Penn, an academic advisor in a very small department who majored in family studies, has been advising for sixteen years. She prides herself on challenging her students on the “shoulds” of life. In a department where the students are overwhelmingly female and tend to share very personal experiences during advising sessions, she embraces her role as facilitator, and finds each student meeting to be an

unfolding. Each time she has a meeting there is the student's own individual journey to bring forth; each time there is a different story to be told.

She recalls her own experience as a first year student at another large university. "When I went to college right out of all-girls boarding school, I hated it, could have cared less" she says. "So I left my college education at that point, and I went to work. . . . Then I did what everybody else did, and I got married."

She was a "stay-at-home mom" for ten years, and had four children. Then, one day, she decided that "This wasn't working for me, and I left." She knew that it was important to her that she complete her college education, and decided to get work on a campus in order to graduate. As a student who took 25 years to earn her own undergraduate degree at the university where she now works, Penn has experienced first-hand the wandering search for meaning. She brings personal understanding and varied life experience into the search for value in education. It allows her freedom in her role as academic advisor. She has been there, and remembers the journey well.

On her best days, Penn tries to be an effective resource for her students, a facilitator of their academic, and often very personal, journeys. On her worst days, she is frustrated at the lack of progress, the wasted time and wandering commitment of some students. She struggles to help them understand the benefit of their college education; "All the pieces that make up how they get through here . . . not just the academic part," can help them. Ultimately, however, she realizes that, like her own, their journey is an individual one, and they must be able to live and determine their own experiences.

The Builder as Purview-er

Helping out is not some special skill. It is not the domain of rare individuals. It is not confined to a single part or time in our lives. We simply heed the call of that natural caring impulse and follow where it leads. (Dass & Gorman, 1985, p. 117)

“I know I’ve been successful if, at the end, someone can say ‘She didn’t suck.’” Diana, a white woman in her early forties, feels an incredible responsibility to be “right.” Another non-traditional student in terms of the time and number of years she spent completing her undergraduate degree in the institution and the department where she now works, her advising philosophy demands that she “give the answer. . . and help as much as you can.” She does not spend a lot of time reflecting on what it means to be an advisor, or how she came to be an advisor. She is, and she did.

Although she has been in her current position for five years, and worked with aspects of advising for six years before that, she still finds that the role of academic advisor is an incredible burden, and she readily admits that she is not sure how much longer she will be able to carry it. “I am nervous to even call myself an academic advisor . . . [I] feel pressured to do right by the student.” She takes her work home with her emotionally, and thinks about how best to guide and assist students, some of whom she admits cannot be helped. “I am proud, but I also think, ‘Oh my gosh, I’m someone’s academic advisor.’”

Ultimately, however, at the end of most days it is rewarding for her to feel like students know the next step, and that she has helped to give clarity and present options to students who were not previously aware of them. She is a bit hampered in her efforts since a significant percentage of the students she advises have “defaulted” into her department when they were unsuccessful in their first choice of major. Other

students have no understanding of what the major entails, and errantly think they can emerge a “weathergirl” or a “sports marketing promoter.” Unlike students who pursue their academic passion during college, the students in her department are sometimes bitter that they are unable to major in their chosen field, and they often find little value in learning about and understanding the theory-based major of which they now find themselves a part. The need to constantly defend the department’s value as a “real” major to some, while promoting the employability of graduates to others is a daunting task.

The Builder as “Real”tor

Service starts in the home where we learn to love and to respect each other, to honor differences, and to resolve conflicts. We begin by reading our immediate world for ethical challenges and opportunities. . . . In our homes, we first practice listening, gratitude, and forgiveness. (Brussat & Brussat, 1996, p. 325)

Preston, a white male in his late thirties who majored in business as an undergraduate, has been an advisor for various pre-professional programs and for students who are undecided about their major for the past five years. Before we begin the interview, he rearranges the room. He places a long narrow table in between us, and puts the two chairs on either side. Without prompting, he explains that this is the way he meets professional colleagues, but not how he interacts with students. “I would never put a barrier between me and a student,” he explains. It is interesting to consider how he compartmentalizes the meetings, and arranges his space accordingly.

He prides himself on being able to photographically remember every student he has ever advised. I am jealous of this since I still struggle to remember students I have seen three or four times. “When I see them in the Union, or in the gym, or

walking on campus, they always want to talk to me—so that’s good.” This is part of his relationship-building with students. “I know their history, I keep detailed notes since the things that happen to them really do affect every single thing that we do together.”

As a pre-professional advisor, Preston provides a lot of information to the students, and makes a lot of suggestions that will assist them in getting into graduate school. Although he holds the key for many students, he places responsibility for turning it firmly back on them. He assures them that “No one else is going to do it for you.” He views himself as a resource, an advocate, and he wants to be a friend and a good listener for students so they can have one person to go to with questions or concerns. “I want to be that one person for a lot of people.”

He is intrigued by the stories the students bring to his table. “Is the student a legacy student? A first generation student?” He spends twenty minutes of a thirty minute appointment finding out where a student is headed. “I want to know everything else besides your grades,” he tells them. He loves the students who come in wanting to share their story. “That’s the kind of student I want to work with every day.”

As someone who went to college because he did not know what else to do and whose parents filled out his college applications, the students he meets with intrigue him. He readily admits that he “never thought in a million years that I would be working with students as an advisor.” His students, with their goal-oriented approach to college, fascinate him. Some of his students are very dedicated to their future career goals and it drives their every decision during high school and during their

years in college. Some are driven by external factors, usually their parents, and they might struggle with the fact that their reality is not the reality their parents wish for them. Preston is their reality check. He calls it as he sees it, but “those who put in” are guaranteed to get something back.

The Builder as Renter

We all have, without exception, a very deep longing to give—to give to the earth, to give to others, to give to the society, to work, to love, to care for this earth. That’s true for every human being. And even the ones who don’t find it, it’s because it has been squashed or somehow suppressed in some brutal way in their life. But it’s there to be discovered. We all long for that. (Kornfield, as cited in Brussat & Brussat, 1996, p. 327)

“There’s (sic) many things I do that aren’t necessarily on my resume.”

Michelle, an African American woman in her mid-twenties, was also an undergraduate at the same institution and in the same department where she now works as an advisor. She also took some time off from completing her undergraduate degree when she had a child during college, and also now advises for the same department from which she graduated. She has “been there and done that,” and now is appreciative of her ability to help other students.

She defines her advising approach as “student-centered,” and she focuses much of her advising on helping them to be successful. “I see myself as someone to challenge students, to help them recognize their goals, and to help them achieve their goals.” She comes from a sense of community for African-American students, and she wants to “demystify some of the myths” that this population of students has about advising. She wants to make advising “accessible and acceptable” for a group of students that, according to her experiences, is historically somewhat reluctant to accept advising input from what she calls the “traditional structure.”

Michelle often accepts invitations to speak at meetings for students of color to help introduce students to a literally different face of advising.

When I first attended the university, I didn't see anyone [in my advising experiences] who looked like me. In my first advising sessions, there wasn't much eye contact. I didn't feel welcome. Where you don't feel comfortable, you don't thrive.

She tries to make sure this does not happen to her own students. "I try to at least illuminate the various paths that students can take to be successful here." She acknowledges that having a child at 19 greatly affected her self-concept as a student. She had to take a year and a half off of school, and when she returned her goals had changed dramatically. She struggles daily with her choice to work outside the home. "Family is very important to me. I've chosen to work outside the home and sometimes I feel guilty about that choice." Other students who are young mothers search her out, even if they do not major in her department. "I'm very caring and nurturing. Students will just walk in and sit down and talk. They don't even want advising. It's a safe place—they know I'm not going to tell on them or expose them."

Michelle presents a relatively unique face of academic advising, being a woman of color in her mid-20s in a field so dominated by white women in their thirties and older. So, despite her failure to attend the group interview or the second individual interview, and despite her failure to respond to any of my follow up calls or emails, I found that her initial voice was an important one to include, albeit limited.

The Builder as Bricklayer

Caring for one another, we sometimes glimpse an essential quality of our being. We may be sitting alone, lost in self-doubt or self-pity, when the phone rings with a call from a friend who's *really* depressed. Instinctively, we come out of ourselves, just to be there with her and say a few reassuring words. When we're done, and a little comfort's been shared, we put down the phone

and feel a little more at home with ourselves. We're reminded of who we really are and what we have to offer one another. (Dass & Gorman, 1985, p. 141)

Lola, a white woman in her early forties, reflects that she has changed since she first started advising undecided students more than eight years ago. When she started, she was “very student driven.” She regularly worked 60 or 70 hour weeks, gave students her home telephone number, and met them outside of regular working hours. Now, she believes that while she is “still about the student,” she’s learned to appreciate the students “who do what they’re supposed to do—what I’ve asked them to do. I hate to say ‘supposed to.’” She now focuses more on empowering her students to make their own choices by providing them with information and options, rather than telling them what classes they need and which professors are the best. “The students are in exploration...it’s important to get to the heart of what they’re thinking. It’s like a Rubik’s cube, with all this stuff on the external that needs to be manipulated to make the whole.”

Beginning her own college career at a local community college, Lola eventually completed 180 undergraduate credits in a double major program, and subsequently earned a Master’s degree and a Ph.D. None of the degrees relate to her job in higher education. She uses her own academic background in exploring majors and future careers with her students. In helping students to identify what they would like to major in during college, Lola rarely asks students what their favorite class was in high school or what subject they like the best. Instead, she asks them to think about what they like to do outside of school, and what they feel really strongly about. She asks them what a typical day might look like in ten years. Are they working with

people? With computers? With people and computers? Are they traveling around the country or the world? Are they responsible for making decisions? She asks them if they could have anyone's job in the world, whose would it be? She enters into these conversations with students as a blank slate, and through the conversation, the students start to develop their own picture of what a college degree might include.

She tries to have a good conversation with her students, and to establish a rapport with them "where they are." She mentions several times that she doesn't want to be the "authority figure" in the advising relationship. She works hard to establish an equality and a trust with her students that allow them to experience the journey in partnership.

Framing the House

Throughout our conversations, the advisors reflect their desire, and innate ability, to "connect" with their students. They speak of "meeting students where they are," and "not trying to tell the student what they need, but listening to what they think they need." They engage with their students holistically, asking questions beyond the "obvious" ones which focus on classes for next semester and summer internships. They recognize that there can be no "cookie cutter" formula that is "right" for everyone. Instead, they identify the importance of being open to receiving information, valuing it as much as their ability to provide it.

These advisors recognize that their relationships with students are temporary, at best, and tenuous, at worst. They aim to connect quickly, earnestly, and responsibly. For a few of them, advising is the "people part" of an otherwise administrative position, and for the others, advising is the central focus of their job

description. What has brought these individuals down this path toward doing academic advising? What has led them on this journey toward enabling students on their own paths to self-discovery? To reach out to others has sometimes required a stifling of self, a silencing of what we believe we “know.” Yet, these advisors also believe they help to elicit the hopes and dreams of their students, celebrating and sorrowing with them during their time in college.

Building Lasting Impressions

Many a family has drawn the plans for a dream house before buying the plot of ground on which it will stand . . . This is planning in reverse order, a serious case of putting the cart before the horse. The planning of a house must proceed correctly, step by step. (Kirkpatrick, 1958, p. 14)

I must show that the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind. The binding principle in this integration is the daydream. Past, present and future give the house different dynamisms, which often interfere, at times opposing, at others, stimulating one another. (Bachelard, 1964/1994, p. 6)

Throughout the conversations with, and reflections of, these advisors, it becomes evident that they create relationships through their academic advising, one student at a time. We all feel rewarded when students request us the next time, or send us a thank you email, or refer us to their friends. We spend every session trying to make a difference that can change a life. We see the big picture through the little details, and we work to ensure that students view, and hopefully value, us as a resource for their time in college.

Through each of our individual lenses, we are advisors who focus on very different groups of students, from a minority-focused department, to a department which is second choice for many, to students who are undecided, to students who are driven to focus on graduate school even as they are only beginning college. Our lived

experiences of doing academic advising are varied and multi-dimensional. There is a testing, a pushing and pulling, and sometimes a sense of urgency to mold the structure. There is often a tearing up of old plans and sometimes a too-quick design for new ones. We continually re-learn that what “works” for one will not work for all, and we strive to expand our own advising tool box to master the new circumstances that arise.

From this foundation about our individual understandings and insights, our shared and disparate experiences, certain themes emerge that are worth considering when exploring the nature of the lived experience of doing academic advising. Van Manen (2003) reminds us that,

Articulating themes is not just a skill of a cognitive process that can be described and then learned or trained. But it may still be useful to ask: How do themes come about? Theme is the needfulness or desire to make sense. Theme is the sense we are able to make of something. Theme is the openness to something. Theme is the process of insightful invention, discovery, disclosure. (p. 88)

The themes which emerged through conversations with academic advisors value the nature of the lived experience of college students, and stress the environment which creates that exploration with others. The emergent themes stress the need to encourage the continued search of and for self, and consider the essential nature of personal and professional development along the way.

Fitting the Moldings

Each student enters the advising relationship in a different place. Experienced academic advisors can usually quickly assess where a student “is” when they begin an advising conversation. We all tailor our conversations to where we encounter each student, fitting the same conversation to each student’s individual circumstances.

Some students want concrete answers, and others want to think about what might happen three years down the road. Some students understand and openly discuss their personal challenges, and others have not yet acknowledged that they might exist. Advisors must think on their feet about how accountable a student is ready to be, about how direct we can be with a student who has been academically dismissed and who does not seem to realize the permanency of that act. Advisors need to gently encourage, to let students know that we are here for them, but that we are also an arm of the institution for which we work. We want students to succeed, to be successful, and to allow us to share in their successes in order that we, too, can feel success within the advising relationship.

“I try to facilitate exploration so the choice is theirs,” says Penn. She is aware of parental influence, partner influence, the influence of children, money, and other outside expectations. “So, how would it feel if you do it differently?” she asks them, encouraging them to prioritize their own opinions. Preston, too, engages in what he calls the “we-factor” conversation. “We’re in this together, but I’m not your mom or dad,” Preston tells his students. “It’s not about me talking. It’s about you asking and taking responsibility for your own stuff,” he explains to them. Lola also spends a part of every advising session “getting to the heart of what a student’s thinking.”

Baxter Magolda (2002) reminds us that “Successful journeys, even short ones, require good company” (p. 2). Advisors find that it is important to “custom fit” our advising conversations, to mold them for each individual student, in order to be effective. Through such tailoring we also allow ourselves to be reflective about what our students need and expect from us through the students’ own voices. Asking

students to assess where they are, where those around them are, and who they want to be allows both advisor and student to enunciate next steps.

Nagel (1994/1998) suggests:

The “stand and deliver” process of sharing substance can only go so far. It must be accompanied by the active participation of students in experiencing some aspects of the information and in gathering, using, and sharing the details. (p. 21)

Academic advisors can learn a lot from her suggestions to teachers to “always be able to answer: ‘Why are we doing this?’” (p. 21). It reminds us to focus on the needs of each individual student, and each individual journey, amidst the details and designs of four-year plans and career workshops and academic probation. Penn embraces these opportunities:

I give my students my undivided attention when I am with them. I give them my ability to actively listen in a way that goes beyond mere academic conversation. I give my students my empathy and compassion, my intelligence and honesty.

Such focus on the student during “their” time really engages the advisor in the lived experience of academic advising, enabling the process to emerge through the dynamic of the conversations that occur as we meet each individual student where they “are.”

Connecting the Wiring

All of the conversants universally agree that we “love,” “appreciate,” “value” and “really like it” when students request to meet with us by name, or tell us how helpful we were the last time they came in for advising. Some of our colleges and departments require mandatory advising every semester, so students are obligated to come in, but we still appreciate students who visit after they change their major or get off of probation, and are just “checking in” or “following up.” Some of us are the

only advisors in our roles, so we are the only ones who meet with student athletes, students studying abroad, or pre-professional students, for example. We still love hearing that students value their experiences with us and when they send their friends to us, even if they are not students in our departments. We value our ability to support students' choices, and to explore areas of interest that might otherwise not emerge. "When male students take a women's studies class, for example, or 'straight' students take LGBT courses, it really opens up some wonderful conversations for advising," explains Penn.

It is discouraging when the advising literature tells us that the elements of developmental advising that we so value were "rated as least important" (Smith & Allen, 2006, p. 62) in a survey of undergraduate students. We know from our own experiences that if we do our jobs well, we will make a difference. We do offer students new options for classes and involvement. We all have countless examples of conversations we have had with students where they took a class we recommended that they never would have taken otherwise, and they return for more suggestions. "That was a great class you suggested last time," they tell us. We value the opportunities to change lives as they present themselves, even if it is one class at a time. We also all value the students who do email us after graduation saying thank you, or who come by before graduation to say goodbye. Ultimately, it is the ability to make the connection that allows us to know we are succeeding, to accept that our own roles in "this process is advising the proper avenue to achieve their goals/dreams" (Preston).

“Because students are so different from each other individually, I think it is important to feel the success from within,” explains Lola. She recounts a story about one of her students who asked her to be a reference when he was applying for Harvard Law School. “As his advisor in only the first two years of his college experience, that was a tremendous honor that he thought enough of me to ask me for that.”

I, too, had a recent experience with a student and his family that reminded me again how connected we really are to our students. I had never met him in person, but Pat first came to my attention a couple of years ago when his father contacted the university to see if he could possibly graduate, even though he had had a mental breakdown, and in all likelihood would not be able to ever return to campus. As a senior, he left school in the middle of his first semester, although he had completed a good majority of his course requirements prior to that time. I worked with the family over the next couple of years to ensure that Pat was enrolled in classes at his local university that would transfer back to this campus, and this past semester he graduated. I went to the room where the graduates assemble to introduce myself and say hello. I extended my hand to shake his and he gave me a big hug. “Thank you so much,” he kept saying. I told him I was proud of him and that I was happy for him and his family. I then went to meet his parents. His father came up and, again in response to my extended hand, gave me a hug. “We’re huggers,” he said. “We wouldn’t be here today if it weren’t for you.” I deferred the praise, explaining that it was really he and his son who had done all the work and made it all happen. “But we expected an administrative response and you took the reins and ran with it,” he said.

Then Pat's mother walked up, and also gave me a hug. "Our family will never forget you," she said, and I teared up a little with this family whom I had never met. The connection is made between advisor and student, and in this case also the student's family, cemented through this experience.

My experience with Pat, however, reminds us that a sense of place, which is so central to the exploration of this phenomenon, can be expanded to include the place found in cyberspace. My relationship with Pat and his family was founded, created, and enhanced through a place which never physically existed, although the relationship was certainly as solid as any in-person connections I have made with students over the years. It would allow us to expand our sense of "shared space" to reflect that space which exists on the internet and in conversations which are solely written text. It also calls upon advisors to be fully present to the language we use, since there is not the chance to learn from body language what might not be "heard." As Brague (1996) reminds us, "We are not at home at home only" (p. 97). It encourages us to consider the lived experiences of doing advising from afar.

Although Lola and Preston regularly engage with students via chat room, Instant Messenger, and email, and while Diana is willing to email students their requirements, they do so with the expectation that students will, at some point, come in person for advising. However, what is the experience of creating an advising relationship with a student whom you never meet in person? How might the dynamics of that relationship change the understandings and expectations of what it means to "do" advising? Would it mean that the place we define together in my office becomes less relevant? Can I stay home and "do" advising?

Steele (2005) suggests that advisors will need to be prepared to encounter more students like Pat, who need to complete their degrees from a distance. He calls for us to be aware of the characteristics and unique needs of distance learners, just as we are aware of other special student populations. Currently, however, at the institution where I work, email advising is generally not done. We require students to come in person for advising. Given the changing dynamics of what it means to “attend” college, however, we might need to establish a new sense of place, one which is not dependent on coming into an office and physically sitting down for an advising meeting.

Hanging the “Fix”tures

I have noticed over the years that the carpet in my office has a little worn path entering the door and leading to the chair next to my desk. The indented impression etched into the carpet by the chair that the students sit in for their advising appointments is forever engraved in the pattern. There is a sense of permanence in the indentation, a comfort in the worn path that indicates the many students who have come before, and the many that will come after. It is a tangible reminder of the people I have encountered, of the hundreds, even thousands, of students who have walked in my office over the years in search of “advising.” Yet despite the number of times I have had the same situations arise as an advisor, I work to remember that for each individual student it is the first time, the biggest issue, a unique challenge that they are facing. Whether it is preparing to take the LSAT, planning for studying abroad, or being placed on academic warning or dismissal, students require a considerate response, a recognition that they are individuals, an understanding that even though

their situations may not be unique, as individuals, they certainly are. There is no simple “fix” for the problems that enter an advisor’s office everyday. It is up to the advisor to illuminate the process for the students, to light the path through certain circumstances, and to ensure that the solutions work for each individual student’s journey.

Light (2001) suggests that “Maybe it is too much to ask that each advisor put out a special effort to help students connect their academic work with their personal passions” (p. 84). My conversants and I, however, take great efforts to do exactly that. We all speak of making sure that each student feels comfortable, even when it might be an uncomfortable conversation that needs to take place. “If we don’t provide that individual advising catered to that student’s need, then we are not living up to our mission of what academic advising is meant to be,” explains Preston. Indeed, we do try to personalize each and every meeting, even on our own “bad” days. We strive to make each meeting a meaningful one, whereby students will leave understanding the next step, empowered toward self-initiation and understanding of the journey which lies ahead.

Building Caring Into Language

Do all the good you can
by all the means you can,
in all the ways you can,
in all the places you can,
at all the times you can,
to all the people you can,
as long as ever you can.

(Wesley, in Brussat & Brussat, 1996, pp. 360-361)

Caring involves stepping out of one’s own personal frame of reference into the other’s. When we care, we consider the other’s point of view, his objective needs, and what he expects of us. Our attention, our mental engrossment is on

the cared-for, not on ourselves. Our reasons for acting, then, have to do both with the other's wants and desires and with the objective elements of his problematic situation. (Noddings, 1984, p. 24)

Throughout our various individual and group conversations it becomes evident that these advisors care deeply about the students and the relationships they establish, be they "one-time-only" or semi-regular sessions with students. They struggle to be "better" and "give more" and "help more" with each student they meet. Even advising sessions that sometimes feel like failures are the result of a deeply ingrained sense of wanting to help, to say the "right" thing that will click with students and send them on a positive path to graduation and life beyond.

Preston recalls vividly that "It was not my academic advisor who got me excited and interested about college. . . . I took in my little sheet, and he signed it, and I took it back out. I never felt much of a connection. . . . Fortunately, I was able to get support elsewhere." He strives to ensure that the students he encounters do not have a similar experience to his own. He endeavors to reach out to and for each and every student he encounters, to make sure that he can be the advisor for his own students that his own advisor was not for him.

As Noddings (1984) reminds us, caring involves a "feeling with the other" (p. 30). As academic advisors, we use the building blocks of self-empowerment, encouragement, and support to create a sense of relationship with our students. We all have conversation "tools" that we use to open up conversations with our students and to let them feel like there is a caring relationship that is capable of being built.

Heidegger (1962/1967) explains:

. . . Being-in-the-world is essentially care. . . . Care does not just characterize its existentiality; on the contrary, it embraces the unity of these ways in which

Being may be characterized. . . . “Care” cannot stand for some special attitude toward the Self; for the Self has already been characterized ontologically . . . the projection of one’s own potentiality-for-Being has been abandoned to the disposal of the “they.” (pp. 237-238)

How do we “prove” that we care for others? Is it necessary to provide something tangible to demonstrate our involvement with “other?” We struggle with how to greet students: Is “What can I do for you” too un-empowering for them? Does it presume that “I” am able to “do” anything for “you” that you cannot do for yourself? Is it better to say, “What brings you in today?” so students take responsibility for their own appointment? Some advisors say, “So, what are we doing today?” with an emphasis on the “we,” so it is a collaborative experience. Should we acknowledge that students do, in fact, need our assistance and that is why they have come? Is it problematic to acknowledge their need? Does it make them dependent when the university strives to create independence?

Noddings (1984) suggests that “A big part of learning to care at a distance is understanding its difficulties and limits. We have to study carefully the language we use” (p. 112). These veteran advisors are very sensitive to the use of language, both verbal and nonverbal. We sometimes have reminders that we should not take anything for granted during our meetings, and that students who “just don’t get it” are often the reflection of an advisor who failed to communicate “it.” Should we strive to embrace inter-dependence, or even intra-dependence, between students and academic advisors?

Hanging the Mirrors

We are always speaking, even when we do not utter a single word aloud.
(Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 187)

How much does our nonverbal communication reveal to the students we meet? In designing a house, a picture is worth a thousand words. Similarly, as academic advisors, our tone of voice often communicates much more than our actual words. Our willingness to slow down, to listen, and to use friendly gestures like nodding and smiling is critical. My mother's words ring in my ears: "What you say is not nearly as important as how you say it." This resonates among the conversants. We all agree that we have had times where we had to deliver bad news to a student who was not graduating, or a student who was being suspended for poor grades or a failed drug test, and we are sensitive to our tone and our body language. Our reflection of their experience is critical to our ability to engage in a conversation, and it has little, if anything, to do with the words we are choosing.

We find that non-verbals within the advising relationship are a two-way street, however. Students often come with advising "blocks" that prevent them from signing up for classes and perceive that the academic advisor stands between them and registration; we are "in the way" of the house that is being built. We sometimes feel like building inspectors with a "stop" order. They may not want our help; they may not want a collaborative experience with an advisor. They are annoyed; they are frustrated; they can be rude and condescending and aggressive. They just want their blocks lifted. Can our body language change their minds? Do they really care what words we use with them?

The advisors value every opportunity to communicate, both verbally and nonverbally, with students. They use intuition to determine the “best” approach to take with each student. Penn often will move from around her desk and sit next to the student at a little table, as does Preston. They both speak of making the professional feel a little more personal for the students. Lola has structured her office so that students are directly next to the computer screen and in front of her; nothing is “hidden.” Diana has a perpetual “open door” policy whereby students can drop by without appointments to ask questions. Michelle reaches out to students of color by attending their group meetings—finding them in their space instead of waiting for them to come to hers.

Heidegger (1962/1967) identifies “Hearkening . . . the sensing of tones and the perception of sounds” (p. 207) to be critical in the creation of trust and self-disclosure. The ability of a student to *want* to share, to *want* to explore options is based on their perception of the receiver of their messages. Heidegger’s “hearkening” helps to establish the building’s foundations, adding solidity to what can sometimes begin as shaky ground. Our awarenesses of the “hearkening” of which Heidegger writes creates new foundations upon which we base our communications, recognizing that openness is more than just asking how a student is doing today. It is truly created within the experience of advisor and advisee through the process of “doing” and “being.”

Being Seen and Not Herded

Noddings (1984) asserts that “If dialogue is to occur in schools, it must be legitimate to discuss whatever is of intellectual interest to the students who are invited

into dialogue” (p. 183). This is a good reminder about the need to engage students where they are, and with language that centers around them. Throughout our conversations, it is evident that these advisors are careful to try to meet each student where they are. We are careful to tailor our messages to the individual in front of us, not the individual’s age, race, religion, gender, or sexual preference, although, when those things are shared or evident to us, it can assist us in our choice of language we use to engage. “It is imperative we keep the lines of communication open” (Noddings, 1984, p. 119). This is the foundation for communicating with our students, and for creating conversation instead of dialogue. We aim to understand where our students are coming from in order to consider more thoughtfully where they might be heading. The conversations necessitate an opening up, require an invitation into understanding the experiences of the students that is sometimes difficult to obtain.

We all acknowledge that we view the need to understand our students as individuals as central to our roles as academic advisors, and as the very basis for the experience of doing academic advising. Penn explains that she requires mandatory advising for students in her major every semester “in order to create those conversations with students.” She wants them to be comfortable and happy, and values the ability to create a full and open relationship with each student. She speaks for all of us when she speaks of advising “the whole student, not just the academic one.” Penn explains:

When I understand I feel open and full to the human experience. I know that may sound a little corny, but without understanding, in the fullest way, I can not take a genuine journey with my students.

Lola finds that these conversations can be challenging ones.

The experience of understanding is something that, I believe, doesn't happen in a moment. It is not being quick to judge and dismiss. It is asking questions to determine what is really going on instead of what is just on the surface. It is switching places with someone, mentally, so that I can feel the empathy and emotion that someone is going through. It is not taking on the burden that the other person is feeling, but rather being a shoulder, an advisor, and a safe place to "spill."

Indeed, the students' perceptions of our understanding of their experiences is central to their willingness to open up during advising sessions. Merleau-Ponty (1964) reminds us that "If I treat [perceptions] as acts of the intellect, if perception is an inspection of the mind, and the perceived object an idea, then you and I are talking about the same world, and we have *the right* to communicate among ourselves . . ." (p. 17).

Subsequently, we find that there is a necessary transition from our language of engagement with our students to our own "homes" for encountering them. We recognize that our communication goes beyond our words and actions. When we invite students into conversation, we are also aware that the space into which they enter is our own "lived space," our "place" to open up to those we meet there. It is within that place that they can encounter us, and all that we bring to the conversation.

Building A Lived Environment

Increasingly there has been a tendency to think of policies, institutions, and behavior itself, as objects of design . . . [she has also] put next to one another the spaces which contain the people who ought most to encounter one another, and [she has] created a "home base," which sounds like a good place to be. . . (Schön, 1983, pp. 76, 84)

The word "home" has a wonderful resonance. Home is where you belong. It is your shelter and place of rest, the place where you can be yourself. (O'Donohue, 1999, p. 32)

Academic advisors find that, somewhat unconsciously, there are a variety of things we do to help create an environment for our students that is indicative of the kind of relationship we want with them. We are sensitive to our physical surroundings and endeavor to use them to make students feel warmly received and comfortable. I wrote extensively in Chapter One about my “place” of advising, and the various items I surround myself with, and which I use to create relationships with students: pictures of places I have traveled, favorite posters, toys and stuffed animals, and various other items. These are my conversation “helpers.” All of my conversants also have such items that define them within their space, be they pictures of our pets, gifts from students, advising awards, and pictures from our travels and of our families. All of my conversants surround themselves with a potpourri of various items, received, collected, and found. We cover our walls with posters and pictures, comics and handmade drawings. Preston, however, takes a minimalist approach, and a rather tongue-in-cheek attitude about his currently empty walls.

I call it the ‘Preston experience’ because everyone knows who I am. Now that I’ve been here for 5 years, I don’t feel I have to establish my space anymore.

His comment, although framed as a joke, reminds us that we do communicate a lot about ourselves through our nonverbal choices, through the set up of our office space, the screen savers on our computers, what we hang on our walls, what kind of mousepad we have, and whether or not we shake hands with students when they enter our doors.

As I engage in conversation with my conversants, I recognize our casual dress. We are all conscious of our clothing, and all tend to “dress down,” with the

exception of Preston, who endeavors to set a more professional tone with his students who aim at graduate professional schools. We agree that we want our students to feel comfortable and that being formally dressed in a suit or dress often creates a barrier between us and our students, who show up in jeans, shorts, even pajama bottoms. Preston, however, believes that formality and professional appearance is essential for the future preparations and success for his students, and so dresses the part and appreciates when his students do the same.

Carving Out Our Individual Space

In using our physical space to communicate with our students, we strive for a sense of comfort, a “place of refuge, shelter, and rest—a haven of warmth where love and acceptance prevail” (Smith, 2006, p. 40). For example, Lola keeps her office lights off and her blinds drawn, with only a small lamp with a dim bulb for light. When one first enters her space it is a stark contrast from the bright fluorescents in the main lobby. Once there for a few minutes, after your eyes adjust to the dim light, however, her goal of setting a comfortable and soothing mood is met. Students can relax and take in her space. Looking around her space, which reflects her love of sports, especially the Dallas Cowboys, and her dog, whose image is the screensaver on her computer, one learns a lot about her before she has even introduced herself. “I like it dark,” she says, telling a story about how her family used to call her Dracula since she always kept her room pitch black as a kid. “I do have lots of sports things. It’s a comfort thing for me, and I think a lot of students can relate to that.” She admits striving for a mood that is both “comfortable” and “professional,” stressing that “advising is more than just choosing classes.”

Diana's space is made up of an eclectic collection of items. Some of them she rescued from the trashcans in front of the offices in the hallway of her building; others she received from students who returned from studying abroad. She values a gift from her supervisor, and supplements it with pictures of her husband and some cartoons, a few of them rather risqué, that she brings from home. There are many items about which to begin a conversation, and which give students something to focus on and think about. "They're symbolic of relationships that I've formed and built and that have meant a lot," she explains. One of the funniest items is a handwritten sign taped on a book case with a glass front. If you look at the bookcase, you can see your reflection in the glass. "I promise," says the sign, "You look great!" One cannot help but laugh, which often sets the tone for Diana's conversations with her students. She admits that her space reflects "that I'm all over the place," she laughs. "There's no real theme—it's whatever I like and makes me laugh."

Penn uses her space to communicate academic opportunities. Her award from the Provost as "Advisor of the Year" and other plaques are displayed next to an array of turtles, representing her university's mascot. The pictures of mountains and unique art objects also invite students in her space to inquire about her love of traveling. "I intentionally created my space," she explains. "The plaques speak to interests I can bring to a conversation. The round table invites different conversations. I want my students to feel a sense of freedom and exploration" through the experience they have during an advising conversation. She uses her space to help her students feel "comfortable" and "happy."

Preston's space is unique in its plainness. He told me that pictures of family, friends and students once lined the walls from floor to ceiling, but now there is nothing on the walls. He explains that he just "got bored" one day and started taking down all of the pictures, and just "never got around" to putting anything else up. In the corner is a six-foot windmill that he rescued from a dumpster behind the library. There is also a very large bookcase with an impressive array of books and brochures for various pre-professional programs and opportunities. It is ironic that such an engaging and enthusiastic personality chooses to be housed in such a sterile environment, even for a little while, although it does immediately draw students into conversation with him, and his focus and their focus is concentrated, each on the other. "People know I'm extremely busy," he says in response to his empty walls. Although the screensaver of his nephew and his gym bag and an extra pair of shoes tucked in plain sight under his desk reflect a brief inner glimpse into the man who holds many answers for his students.

Michelle's space is almost sacred space for her, the same space where she came as an undergraduate to meet with her advisor, an advisor who subsequently took her own life. Michelle has made few changes to the space in the year she has occupied it, not claiming it as her own as of yet, with the exception of hand-drawn pictures and cards made by her daughter tacked onto the bulletin board behind her desk. Even the labels on the forms that she uses daily were created by an advisor no longer physically present, but very much emotionally so. "I'm kind of superstitious," she explains. "I feel like this was her space for all that time—who am I to change it?"

For Michelle, the space of another that she now inhabits still speaks, at times, more loudly than she does.

Putting Out the Welcome Mat

All of the advisors express their belief that the structure of their space, and the way in which the space welcomes the students, contributes toward determining the “success” of an advising session. Heidegger (1962/1967) reminds us that “Man [sic] lives the meaning of his own life” (p. 322). We all ask what we would like, what we define as welcoming space, what kind of environment it is in which we wish to dwell, and we create such. Neal (1994) suggests an experience which has relevance for many academic advisors:

I questioned how I might relate to students in such a way that our encounters would allow for a genuine dialogue to lead us back to an “original announcing” of some truths about ourselves and the experience of being teacher and students together. (p. 129)

The desire to use our space in order to connect better with students emerges throughout our conversations, and is based in our efforts to meet the students where they are, to enable them to succeed, and to give them confidence in their own abilities. To remind students that we, too, have families and hobbies, have goals and lives outside our four walls help to bring us forward in conversation. As Bachelard (1964/1994) explains,

In this dynamic rivalry between house and universe, we are far removed from any reference to simple geometrical forms. A house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space. (p. 47)

Through our space, and our choices about how we each engage in and inhabit that space, we strive to embark on an advising partnership with our students.

Building: A “Do-It-Yourself” Approach

Home, of course, is the penultimate place of experience, second only to the body. . . . The home is the tool for the process of creating or becoming an identity. . . . It conceals and it reveals. (Platt, as cited in Rouner, 1996, p. 112)

Cultivation as caring-for extends to the architectural realm as well. Here we cultivate the many ways in which we can dwell in built places . . . in institutions and residences, in neighborhoods and entire cities. We cultivate the concrete forms in which we dwell, and we begin by cultivating the construction of places. . . . In building-as-cultivating, the builder respects the already present properties of that from which building begins. (Casey, 1993, p. 173)

As academic advisors, we tend to bring our own academic backgrounds and experiences with us into every session with every student and share them willingly. Even in conversations amongst ourselves, we mostly comment that we didn’t really “need” advising as undergraduates, and how we just “followed directions” and “got it done.” Now, as professional advisors, we recognize that academic advising accomplishes so much more than just “getting it done.” We help to empower students who might not know how to empower themselves. We open up opportunities for students who might not learn of them otherwise. We advocate for and encourage students who might fall down academically. We get involved, contribute, and feel many of the successes and failures of our students. We help them to identify their needs and wants, to enunciate their goals and expectations in a way that most have never done before. We help them re-think, re-categorize, and re-formulate their self-concept, but try very hard not to create it for them. We help them to “think big” but to still be realistic. We are there to help “pick up the pieces” when needed. The advisors care deeply about the dwelling, both literal and figurative, that students create in

college, and all of them reach out beyond the four walls which house their official “office” in order to connect the students to the structure.

Universally, however, this group of advisors is sensitive to the fact that while we can advise, we should not “do” for students. They must “do” for themselves. Frost (1991) reminds us that traditional, or prescriptive, advising “is a relationship acknowledging the authority of advisers (sic) and the limitations of students. . . the new approach suggests that students and advisers (sic) share responsibility for advising” (pp. 15-16). She goes on to assert that “Developmental advising is a process . . . developmental advising is concerned with human growth. . . developmental advising is goal related . . . developmental advising requires establishment of caring interaction” (p. 17).

I found through my conversations that we all have different ways of approaching the same goal of letting students develop their own sense of identity, and of equipping them to make their own choices. We all have our own ways of entering into conversations that allow students to develop confidence in their own autonomy. We all stress self-empowerment. We want to be resources for our students, and for them to feel comfortable coming to us for help, guidance, and advice. We want to teach them to set short-term and longer-term goals, to identify their own resources, to know the various sources of information on the college campus to help them identify and develop their goals and initiatives.

Preston explains:

[My] definition of success at its basic level is whether or not an undergraduate student achieved his or her goals and was admitted to a professional/graduate school of study. My role within this process is advising the proper avenue to achieve their goals/dreams. So, my experience of success as an academic

advisor depends on whether or not I give out the proper resources and advice to students interested in all [related] fields of study.

However, the holistic approach and the experience of success as an academic advisor is in the relationship that you build with your student population. Success of an academic advisor is whether or not students use your professional services. I know I am a success as an academic advisor every time I get that thank you card or an email saying how much I have helped in their process. Positive feedback from your students is the true sign that you have been a success and provided the correct resources.

Measuring the Doorways

We all found that being able to support students to seek out their own “right thing” was an invaluable part of the experience of doing academic advising. Penn shares her own experiences of watching her students grow.

With each session with a student, I come to know more of the world through their stories. I am challenged consistently to investigate my assumptions of race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and much more when I talk with students about choices and directions. I am humbled by the breadth of the students’ experiences and the courage they exhibit all the time. I learn patience and compassion. I learn about new research to investigate as I learn of their interests. I understand how important my job is as an academic advisor.

When we come together, we reveal the ways in which we encourage students to become “do-it-yourself-ers,” finding common ground through our common building materials. As Heidegger (1968) explains, “In order to get underway, we do have to set out . . . we must take the steps by which alone the way becomes a way” (p. 169). My conversants find that first step for students is sometimes a difficult one to take, as students are sometimes woefully unprepared for their experiences in college, and become dependent on anyone who will “just tell” them what to do. Preston, especially, has dealt with students who come in and “have no idea” what they need to do to take the steps they need to gain admission into graduate professional programs: “They don’t allow me to facilitate the process,” he says. Lola has also encountered

numerous students who are not yet “ready to embrace their own challenge and do something about it.” She, too, however, recognizes the importance of waiting for students to find their own way, of “letting go” and allowing students to make their own way:

Letting go is recognizing what can be done, or what should be done according to policy or procedure, and then letting the person with the issue resolve it on their own. As an academic advisor, especially in the earlier years, it was hard to let it go. I wanted to make it all better. As I have matured as a professional, I have come to understand that students in their various situations have choices that they need to make on their own for the benefit of their own maturity. All I can do is help them define those choices and hope that they do what is best for them. (Lola)

Selecting the Furniture

Frost (1991) reminds us that “advising is a means, not an end . . . in the process, students can learn to frame appropriate questions, seek out needed information, and learn decision-making skills” (p. 71). She also stresses that advisors should “treat [the students] as partners by sharing responsibility for advising with them” (Frost, 1991, p. 73). All of my conversants agree that it is sometimes easier to “just do it” ourselves. Rather than wade through the schedule of open classes, explaining each and every option available, and encouraging students to make their own choices about their academic options and opportunities, it is sometimes easier to just give students a schedule that we know will “work,” and then send them on their way. We all have had experiences of being exhausted answering never-ending questions about the classes that are “easy” and “open” and about how long the walk between classes is during the registration period. We have all encountered the students who didn’t register on time and now complain bitterly that they cannot get into the classes they need for graduation. When we ask why they didn’t register on

time, they fail to take responsibility. “I didn’t know,” “No one told me,” “I thought they oversubscribed seniors,” the students respond. It is difficult not to shake our heads in disbelief. How can a graduating senior be so completely irresponsible—what happened to all that autonomy and self-empowerment? It makes us just want to hijack the concept of the “process” of advising, and just get it done.

Michelle reflects on the pitfall all advisors face at some point in their professional experiences: “I have the responsibility of helping students realize their goals, helping them sort out any obstacles that may prevent them from being successful at whatever they want to accomplish.” Sometimes in our zeal to be helpful we fail to provide a complete set of options, and sometimes we are not even aware of all the options ourselves. I remember meeting once with an Honors student during summer orientation. I made a wisecrack about math, and how she must be happy that she earned a high enough SAT score in math that she was exempted from the fundamental studies math requirement since students in my college tend to hate math and are glad to be done with it. Later as we were registering her for classes, she told me what a passion she had for calculus and that she really wanted to continue it in her studies during college. I felt terrible that I had been making all these math jokes, at the expense of her interests. I learned a lot from that encounter, and now try not to presume that I know the correct answer, or even the “best” classes for students to take. Even when students ask my opinion, I always remember that what I may like and be interested in may be of little use or interest to someone else. I also try to be aware that my age and experience and years spent in education have affected my

perspectives. It forces me to expand my boundaries, to think outside the academic box my advising college fits within, and to help students explore their own interests.

Penn, too, reflects her experience with empowering her students to “do-it-yourself.”

With each session with a student, I come to know more of the world through their stories. I am humbled by the breadth of the students (sic) experiences and the courage they exhibit all the time. I learn patience and compassion. I learn about new research to investigate as I learn of their interests.

We are reminded daily that our conversations with students must continue to ask instead of tell, encourage instead of do. The “do-it yourself” approach to college is essential for students if they are to take that next step beyond. In his consideration of imagination, Casey (1976) asks about the significance of autonomy: “What is its actual place in human experience?” (p. 203). Academic advising “places” the ability of students to act autonomously as a developmental initiative, so the less the students need us, the more successful we have been. It is an intriguing paradox, the less we do, the more we have done.

Building Confidence in the Unknown

As difficult as it is for people in a helping profession, sometimes three little words threaten to knock down all that we work to build as we engage in academic advising: “I don’t know.” However, we ensure that the re-construction quickly follows: “But I can find out.” Indeed, Heidegger (1962/1967) reminds us that “A state of mind always has its understanding, even if it merely keeps it suppressed. . . . The kind of Being which Dasein has, as potentiality-for-being, lies existentially in understanding” (pp. 182-183) that which is merely possible.

Each of my conversants specifically highlights the importance of giving complete and accurate information to students, and of recognizing and taking responsibility for their role as an important resource. Advisors value their role in what can appropriately be viewed as a construction supervisor. For each student's college experience, they carry the burden of accuracy and honesty heavily. They need to make sure all the pieces are set into place and ready to be used, and false information, whether given intentionally or unintentionally, can mean the difference between success and failure. We engage in our jobs with the understanding that we may be the only university administrator that a student ever deals with in such a large college setting. This means taking responsibility for our interactions with students, and needing to acknowledge we are not the omniscient advisor that students might wish us to be, and which we sometimes might envision ourselves as being. It means acknowledging potential personal fault and professional fallacy. It is a literal and figurative stepping back from one's established place, and re-conceptualizing who possesses power and knowledge. It means publicly acknowledging when our own mistakes are made, and recognizing when others make them, as well. It can be a difficult thing to subvert one's own ego to protect another's interests, and yet it is something that academic advisors are called on to do on an almost daily basis, deserved or not.

Taking the Unknown Road

Gordon (1992) reminds us that one of the most significant elements of academic advising lies in providing accurate information to our students. Saying "I don't know" means acknowledging that an academic advisor is not in possession of

all the answers needed to do one's job, and it can put fragile egos, and concerned students, to the test. We have all heard horror stories from students and colleagues about advisors who "made it up." Whether it was "made up," or the advisors in question just didn't care or know enough to find out the correct information, the stories quickly become urban legend. Michelle shares one such story:

My colleague in another college once told me that one of their departmental advisors didn't know that a student needed to get prior permission before studying abroad. The student went abroad and was totally messed up while she was there since the paperwork was never filled out for her. She had to completely reapply for admission, she wasn't able to register on time, and she needed to take summer classes instead of graduating in May. All because the advisor couldn't pick up a phone and ask when the student said 'What should I do next?'

There is the definite perception that the ability to be honest about "not knowing" also separates the "good" advisors from the "bad" advisors, the "professionals" who are able to find out and the "laypersons" who just want to finish the appointment. It demands follow-up, and follow-through. Heidegger (1962/1967) explains, "Just as *circumspection* belongs to concern as a way of discovering what is ready-to-hand, solicitude is guided by *considerateness* and *forbearance*" (p. 123).

It can sometimes serve as a host's favor, a gift given to those who come to one's home, for advisors to acknowledge to students that they "don't know." Indeed, "We may gain [the students'] respect by frankly admitting our limitations" (Corey, 1996, p. 34). Consideration for the advising relationship and a request for the student's patience can be invited while "the answer" is sought out. I have found that many students actually appreciate me more when I tell a student that I do not know the answer to their question, and they always sit patiently while I pick up my phone and make a call, sometimes more than one, or pull out the Undergraduate Catalog and

look up the answer. It puts us fully in the conversation together, working in tandem to search out a response to their query. They respect my honesty, my resources, my willingness to help, and my desire to help them find the answer no matter how long it takes. Often I need to explain that I will contact them again via email or phone if one of my resources is not available, or if someone indicates that they need to look into the situation further. I do not make up answers; I double-check my information to make sure it is correct before my students leave our shared place. In fact, our ability to join together in search of mutual answers binds us together in this space for a more permanent time, and reflects itself when the student returns again and prefaces the conversation with, “You were so helpful the last time we met.” Strangely enough, that comment emerges from the advisor’s initial sense of feeling un-help-full.

Diana, too, knows and uses her resources well. She tries to make sure the student does not have to work too hard to find answers that she has ready access to herself. She calls Financial Aid, the Bursar, or the Registrar in order to keep the student from making an extra or an unnecessary trip. She values being friendly and accurate, and also stresses the importance of saying “I don’t know” when she does not know. She tries not to assume, and tries not to get too involved. She also never wants to lose sight of the consequences of her actions and advice. She is quite aware, perhaps even fearful, of the potential consequences of being wrong, of making an error, and she struggles daily to ensure she never does. “It’s a burden,” she says. “You need to be right, or there are some serious consequences.” She is not sure how she might live with those consequences if she did. Indeed, none of my conversants are prepared for the consequences of being the one who prevented a student from

graduating by not acknowledging when we do not know, and it is a sign of our professionalism when we can.

Creating Shared Experiences and Knowledge

For other advisors and students, however, it can be a true test to “not know.” It is also a challenge to the traditional hierarchy that many college students bring with them from childhood: “adult” equals “answers.” They are not always sure what to do when an advisor says “I don’t know.” The advisors worry that trust sometimes dims when they admit to not knowing, and have to call other people for answers. Is it fair that advisors should perceive that they have to “know it all?” Gordon (1992) asserts that “Advisors play many roles—expert, advocate, authority, rubber stamp, judge, teacher, and friend. . . when the student approaches an advisor with a specific concern, the student may assume that the advisor will play a specific role” (p. 51). No where in these roles is there room for the advisor who “does not know” or who is “unsure.”

What happens when the advisor and student are “not knowing” together? Sometimes a sense of joint partnership is created, as student and advisor collaborate to seek out answers to questions. But there can also be the “Well, who should I talk to, then? Who is in charge?” This seems designed to put the advisor in her rhetorical and metaphorical place, to re-mind her that her place is but a single brick in a very large house. Students who are not happy to dwell in un-knowing, even for a moment, can un-build, un-make an advisor’s sense of self in the doing of academic advising.

In some ways, however, there is also a certain freedom, and even a challenge to not knowing. “Just when you thought you knew and heard it all . . .” Preston

laughs. It allows advisors to continue to grow in their own knowledge. Some advisors, like Diana, challenge themselves daily to find one thing they didn't know at the beginning of the day that they will know at the end. It allows for everyday personal growth and development, for expansion of the building that is our shared experience of academic advising. As Penn reflects, "What it means to call myself an academic advisor is that I'm helping people," and that guiding value is based on honesty in her interactions with her students.

Similarly, Lola considers her perspectives on creating relationships with her students as being based on her own experiences as an undergraduate:

I give students my time and attention. As an undergraduate, I had an advisor who did not want to converse with me and couldn't care less beyond signing off on my schedule. I always keep that in the back of my mind. This is a large campus and students can really get lost in the red tape and hoops that they have to jump through. I give to them by recalling my own experiences and not forgetting what it was like to be an undergraduate . . . but I also recognize that times are changing and students' needs are very different than when I was an undergraduate.

Being aware of the challenges that today's undergraduates face, and recognizing that "smarter" students do not necessarily mean "more mature" students, allows academic advisors to reflect on their goals for the advisor-advisee relationship. Recognizing that we cannot possibly know all the answers, and admitting that within the construct of the advising relationship, is the foundation for growth. Noddings and Shore (1984) remind us to ask, "What is this receptivity to which we submit ourselves and over which we have so little control? The object of intuition seems to be both given and taken, offered and accepted, in one process" (p. 77). After all, "At bottom, we want to make sure that our students are not 'just' listening and following directions. We want to make sure they are thinking as well" (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 83).

Building With What We Find

The human heart is inhabited by many different longings. In its own voice, each one calls to your life. Some longings are easily recognized, and the direction in which they call you is clear . . . At different times in your life, they whisper to you in different ways. (O'Donohue, 1999, p. 9)

An unexpected theme that started to emerge in my conversations with the advisors is the nature of collected objects. At least three of us acknowledge having items in our offices that we found and took out of the trash. It reflects the old adage, "One man's trash is another man's treasure."

"I pulled this Chinese calendar out of the trash" in the hallway, Diana says. She says she just saw it sitting in a trashcan outside of a faculty member's office one day and decided to take it. She cannot say why the calendar called to her, but she felt she needed to take it out of the trash and hang it up in her office, even though it is the wrong year. Something about it makes her happy. She says students do not really ask her about the calendar; "They can't really read what it says anyhow," she laughs. But it hangs there in her office, year after year, with its bright red designs and colorful accents, reminding her of something that she cannot quite name.

The six-foot windmill in Preston's office was also rescued from someone else's trash. "I got it out of the dumpster when the library was remodeling." It called to him, lying there on its side, as he thought of all the places the wind travels and his own love of traveling and feeling as free as the wind. Sometimes, Preston acknowledges, he feels confined by his job of helping other people achieve their dreams and not pursuing his own. The windmill gives him hope that he can travel as far as the winds will carry him. He also views the windmill as a metaphor for the students he meets with, as varied as the wind, and headed in as many different

directions. “[Students] always ask about it. They wonder if I made it,” he says. He tells them no, but that it reminds him that anything is possible if you put your mind to it.

One day soon after I started in my job of academic advisor, I found a ficus tree in the trash room in my apartment complex. At the time I rescued it, I was not a big “plant person,” but it seemed sad that someone would just throw it out when it looked like a perfectly healthy and living tree. I decided to trim it a bit so it would fit in my car, and take it to work, where I have a big window that I knew the tree would love. I have the tree sitting on top of a table, so it is about 12 feet tall. “Wow, that’s a big tree” some students will comment. I sit back and smile, happy for the rescue. It speaks to my need to help things recover, to grow, to be rehabilitated. If the tree can survive its dismissal, perhaps my students can as well.

Recognizing Our Goal of “Making It Better”

The conversations about the “rescuing” of trash became an interesting metaphor for the work that we do. All of us have had numerous advising experiences of “rescuing” students who had been cast off by the system, or kicked out of or denied entry into a major, and we all have experienced the feeling of triumph at seeing those students succeed, and helping them to find a new home academically and personally. We identify potential, dust it off a little, and make it useful again. It makes us all feel good about our role of helper, rescuer of “cast-offs” by others, even as we all acknowledge we are not usually in the habit of sifting through other people’s discarded trash.

Diana shares a story about one of her “rescued students:”

Marla came into my advising office as a transfer student interested in [the major I advise for]. She came from a small school and [this institution] overwhelmed her. She came into my office because she had no idea how to register for classes using [the campus registration system]. I worked with her, explained the process, and had her register for the classes herself. She was relieved that she had registered for her classes on her own and was thankful that I was watching her steps. From that moment on, she has consulted me for my opinion on the various courses she is taking to make sure they are fine. This connection to an advisor at the university helped her when she began to experience serious medical issues. Both Marla and her Mom relied on me for support to help with issues concerning Marla’s semester registration and how to proceed from this point.

Marla is still recovering from her disorder but she is taking things one step at a time. She often feels bad that she is not progressing as nicely as she would like to because her condition prevents her from doing too much at one time. I make sure she doesn’t feel bad about the situation or herself before she leaves my office. But I also have to realize that I’m not qualified to deal with her bigger issues so I need to make sure she is getting the proper help.

Similarly, Penn tells a story of a literal rescue of one of her students. She once had a student who was raped, and then stalked by the man who attacked her. The student was afraid to even walk around campus. She had taken a class in Penn’s department and came to Penn for advice, even though she was not a major in Penn’s department. Penn assisted her in getting professional counseling, police help, and she eventually graduated from college. The student continues to keep in touch with Penn, and now works at a job that is heavily involved in social justice issues. She is a cancer survivor, and recently married and had a child. “That,” says Penn, “is my success.”

These experiences are only a few examples of the challenges faced within the academic advising relationship formed between student and advisor. As previously explored, we are not trained as professional counselors, and will not engage in “diagnosing” students with potential or real mental health issues. However, we do live in the reality that a lot of the students who come to us will have problems that

need to be addressed. But, as Noddings (1992) reminds us to ask, “How much are we obligated to do?” (p. 110). While we like the feeling of helping, of participating with students whom we need to “rescue,” we also need to be aware of our “collector tendencies,” our desire to “fix it,” and guard against potential harm. Noddings (1992) suggests that we “learn to care at a distance” (p. 112), but then tells us that we must be aware of our temptation to “initiate and control. . .[and we may] overlook the possibility that others may want most the power to create their own meanings and explore their own possibilities” (p. 116). As academic advisors, however, this seems to be a built-in expectation. We form relationships with our students, and will knowingly continue to sift through the discards of others, hoping to make connections with and for those whom we encounter.

Care-Full Listening

What does it take to listen? When is it fit to listen? To whom do we listen? . . . Listening requires a mind that is consciously, intentionally, and willfully directed to attend fully to the voice of another. (Lashley, Neal, & Slunt, 1994, p. 190)

Listening is a question of character. Its development is a practice of the self. In this practice, one works on oneself. It is a moral struggle to *become* someone who can always listen and hear the truth—to become a person who *seeks* the truth, who *values* the truth more than ease, more than gain. It sometimes requires enormous courage to listen and hear the truth. (Levin, 1989, p. 137)

Another common experience of doing academic advising that my conversants share is the critical importance of the need to listen. A number of years ago, I had a friend who once asked me to stop finishing his sentences. I was a little taken aback at the time, but when I reflected on it later, I realized that I did, indeed, have a tendency to try to complete his sentences. Usually I was right in anticipating what he was going

to say next, and sometimes I was wrong. That did not seem to matter. It was obvious that I was more interested in trying to get to my response to his comment rather than allowing myself to really listen to what he was trying to say. He just wanted the opportunity to complete his thought without my help, and to have my respect as a listener.

That experience was definitely a significant one to have had in preparation for my role as a professional academic advisor. Although we, as academic advisors, often believe that we have heard it all before, and that we know all of the possible excuses and reasons and options the students bring to us, it is absolutely critical that we be responsive and reflective listeners. This is important not only because a student might say something unexpected, but also because we owe that to the relationship. Levin (1989) reminds us that there should be a “skilful (sic) cultivation of our perceptual capacities,” (p. 84) and wonders, “Do we know how to listen to others in an open, welcoming, receptive way?” (p. 85).

Diana reflects this need daily. “It is important to listen, to hear the whole thing through” before trying to respond, she says. She notes how the story sometimes changes along the way and if she lets the whole story come out before trying to respond, she finds herself more helpful to the student. “Don’t assume you know what they’re asking,” she says. “Wait for them to actually ask the question, then respond to it.

Penn, too, stresses the need for what she calls “active listening.” Within her group of advisees, there are numerous personal journeys that she hears about during her advising sessions. “Remember that you’re a part of that student’s journey, but you

are not the journey itself. Their experience does not begin and end with you, so don't fill in their blanks."

It is critical, this notion of care-full listening. "The aim of listening is to experience communion with others. To experience communion with another requires that we listen not only to what is being said but to the context in which another is given voice" (Lashley, Neal, & Slunt, 1994, p. 190). It is a good reminder to slow down, breathe deeply, and allow our students to express themselves in their own time, and with their own words. For, as Heidegger (1962/1967) reminds us, "Listening to...is Dasein's existential way of Being-open as Being-with for others. . . Dasein hears, because it understands" (p. 206).

Building Amidst Our Own Fault Lines

Just as we find new meaning and empowerment in identifying and working with the "discards" of others, we all also have stories of how we, in turn, have needed to let go of students that we know need to be referred to someone else. We are reminded that we need to make referrals when necessary, and to acknowledge when situations are out of our areas of expertise and training (Hill & O'Brien, 2001). However, we also need to be cautious that we do not facilitate over-reliance in our students because it makes us feel needed, and to recognize that in some situations our own "personal issues place [us] at risk for encouraging dependency in those [we] assist" (Hill & O'Brien, 2001, p. 7). We also occasionally encounter students whose personal and academic issues go beyond the walls of the advising relationship and require us to refer them elsewhere.

Inspecting Our Own Closets

It is a fine line we walk between liking our students and needing our students, between being their friend and being their advisor. It is sometimes difficult to make that separation, and we wonder about keeping appropriate boundaries with students that we sincerely like and enjoy interacting with. Also, being human, we recognize that we are not going to like every student we encounter, and we might take on a certain attitude as we “fashion [ourselves] . . . as wise distributors of knowledge and advice” (Hill & O’Brien, 2001, p. 11).

As Lola reflects, “I have made some friends in my students who have moved on to other majors and graduated. I don’t think it’s a bad thing to acquire friends from your student caseloads.” We all acknowledge that we struggle with this, however, since the relationship initiated is a “one-way” relationship where students come to advisors for a professional reason. At what point, and under what circumstances, can that relationship change into a two-way “friendship?” Is it then appropriate to continue the professional advising relationship with that student?

“Friend,” from the Old English *frēond*, means a person who is “attached to another by feelings of affection or personal regard” (Barnhardt, 1995, p. 300). The second definition, however, truly embodies the relationship between advisor and student, defining “friend” as being “A person who gives assistance, a patron, a supporter” (Barnhardt, p. 300). It begs a reconsideration of the “professional” boundaries that some advisors, including myself, have erected around the notion of being “friends” with students. While certain behaviors might never be appropriate in the context of a professional friendship, the open sharing and support that comes with

being a “supporter” and a “person who gives assistance” would seem to broaden the experience of doing advising rather than limiting it needlessly.

Embracing this concept of “friend” would allow for an extension of our sense of caring, one of the foundations supporting the relationship advisors have with their students. As Noddings (1992) reminds us, “. . . It is important not to detach carers from caring relations” (p. 18). Rethinking the somewhat artificial boundaries that we sometimes establish might lead to a greater acceptance of the fact that “. . . The contribution of the cared-for is not negligible” (Noddings, p. 17).

Another challenge that advisors face in advising interactions are students who threaten or challenge us and our decisions. Advisors accept relatively early on that we will not “click” with every student, but it is also important for us to know when the advising relationship has moved beyond the point where it can be repaired and when we must ask for outside intervention. Lola tells of a 25-year old student who was academically dismissed when he kept failing his English and math classes.

I met with him a couple of times to talk about his goals and develop a plan of action to get him off academic dismissal. He took his math and English courses over again and failed them again. He missed several appointments with me in the meantime. Of course he was dismissed again. . . . He wanted me to support his application. When I told him I would not support it due to his failure to complete his advising obligation, he would not accept my decision. He was constantly sending me emails and showing up at the office waiting to see me. He did this all summer long. He would send me an email in the morning saying that he was coming to see me, not asking me if it was okay, just telling me that he was coming. Some of the days he would do this were orientation days, and then he would just sit in the lobby for hours waiting for me to see him. After about the fifth time of him doing this, I pulled him into my office to re-explain that I could not, or would not, do anything to support his reinstatement. His responses were very bizarre and he would just sit there and smile at my frustration. This was the closest I ever came to yelling at a student. . . . [After referring the student to her Director] I looked out my window and saw him standing at the foot of the stairs just staring up at my window. I went to the Director and told her. She called the police and had

him escorted off campus with the understanding that he could not come within 500 feet of our building. Thank goodness I never heard from him again.

Preston's experiences of having to let go of students take on additional significance for him, not only in terms of the students he felt unable to reach, but also his feeling that his interactions with students can affect their long term goals. He also felt concern about his professional reputation in a more immediate way than with most advisors. "If the student did everything I told them to do they would absolutely get in. If they don't get in, they didn't do what I told them to." Still, he feels disappointed that the students didn't trust him enough to help them. Some of the failures haunt him more than others.

She never took responsibility for her own failure. So what do you do? You do as much as you can, and that's all you can do. But it's still with me, and that was months ago. I did everything right, but there's still this feeling that she thinks I was the one responsible for crushing her dream.

We reflect as a group on our inability to reach some students while doing and saying the same things we do for those with whom we find success. Winston (1996) reinforces this conversation, explaining that "If I can provide a certain type of relationship, the other person will discover within himself the capacity to use that relationship for growth and change, and personal development will occur" (p. 336). Ultimately, that is the Achilles heel we all face when engaging in academic advising because we all believe that just by trying, we will be successful. We try not to "tell," but to suggest. We try not to lecture, but to advise. Gordon and Habley (2000) remind us that we now encounter students who take a "consumer approach to education" (p. 212). It is a different approach than the one we were raised with, and it expects that

we fill needs, rather than develop students into young adults with the resources to meet their own needs.

Diana shares a story about her student Rachel.

Rachel had been academically dismissed and was returning to [college] for the Fall semester. She required many hours of follow up to make sure her readmission application was supported and she was taking the appropriate classes to graduate. When I met her, she had two years to go to complete her degree. During those two years, I continued to meet with Rachel on a regular basis. Because of her dismissal status, she required special advising each semester until she got off the dismissal list. This regular contact allowed her to share her experiences about how much it meant that she was back in school and given another chance to complete her degree. Since I was still learning how to be an advisor, I listened to her. I think the listening component is the most important aspect of being an advisor.

Diana also introduced Rachel to another advisor who worked in the college office.

She made sure that Rachel knew the other advisor was another source of support for her as she progressed through her first semester back.

Building Caring Within the Advising Relationship

As Noddings (1992) reminds us, “Schools cannot accomplish their academic goals without attending to the fundamental needs of students for care and continuity” (pp. 63-64). She calls it their “guiding purpose” (p. 64). The development of trust between students and academic advisors is central to the notion of caring for students in college. Since the students are technically “adults,” it is up to them to reach out and ask for help. Even when they have “mandatory” advising appointments, there is no requirement that they confide in their advisors. They know that they need to check in, get an audit, and complete a four year plan. However, most students will not take the next step and think about establishing a relationship with their advisor. The ability to take this next step depends on their own sense of faith in the advising system and the

advisors with whom they are interacting. They must also trust that their advisor has their best interests at heart and will help them get answers to their questions.

It is up to advisors, too, to remember their role in the advising relationship as trust is a two way street. As Lola reflects:

I see myself in some of my students. I see the kinds of things that they are going through and how they are handling [it]. I think it is SO important to remember your past. I've heard many times that if we fail to study history, we are doomed to repeat it. I don't know that I am doomed to live the life of an 18 year old again, but I do need those little reminders of where I came from and what my motivations used to be.

It is sometimes tempting to just tell students what they want to hear and send them on their way. But, as I have told many students over the years, it does not benefit me to tell them something that is not true. If I am not sure what a certain class is about, I tell them. If I have heard good things or not-so-good things about a professor, I tell them that, too. If I do not, not only will they be upset about it, they will tell their friends, and that will reflect on their perception of the academic advising relationship, as well. I cannot even begin to count the number of students who come in as seniors and tell me that they have "heard horror stories about students who got messed up" by an advisor and they could not graduate. I always ask "How?" Usually the reply is that "no one told" the friend what they needed to take, and the friend, therefore, was short credits for graduation or missing some specific graduation requirement. Generally, a little investigating shows that the student was, in fact, given the correct information, often more than once, but they failed to heed the advice that was given. I have showed old audits to many students who ask "How come no one ever told me that before?" The audits show that they were told that before, but then a common reply is, "Well, how was I supposed to know what that meant?" There is no

good response to this that does not sound condescending. I do not know how to battle that kind of mistrust, that kind of misplaced anger. Obviously it is easier to be angry at anyone except one's self in these circumstances, but it does sometimes hurt that it is so easy to blame the advisors who were attempting to help. "I can only help you try to make it better," is my usual response. I try somewhat desperately to re-earn lost trust in order to continue to build the positive relationships that sustain academic advising.

All of these conversations, repeated daily during the busy registration period, wear away at the trust built between advisor and student. Advisors must trust students not to misrepresent conversations and students must trust the advisors and ask questions when they do not understand something. Even a plea to "make sure you check in if you have questions" often falls on deaf ears as students just go through the process in order to register on time.

Hiding Behind the Open Door

Another theme that emerged throughout our conversations is the literal and figurative open door policy that we employ. The advisors all acknowledge having an "open door policy," whereby students can come by when they need or want to, and the advisors will make every effort to see them whether or not they have an appointment. Despite being scheduled back-to-back with appointments every thirty minutes, we all acknowledged also allowing, and even encouraging, students to "stop by" if they are following up on an appointment, or just need a form signed. We have found that it would be virtually impossible to see every student who needs to see us if they all needed a 30 minute appointment, and using a time slot for a quick question or

signature would not be a good use of the limited time we have. So, we literally open our doors to students throughout the day, and are able to accomplish much with these “drop-ins.”

However, we all also acknowledge that we have a literal open door policy whereby we keep the doors of our offices open during meetings, unless there is a really good reason to close them. For one of us, even a crying student was not enough reason to close the door. It is a sobering reminder that we all fear our litigious society wherein students might say or do things, or say that we, the advisor, said or did things, and we want to make sure we are protected.

We all have encountered angry and seemingly irrational students; we all have worried what might happen if a student really “lost it” during an advising session, wondered about getting metal detectors at the front doors to our offices, and wondered how quickly the police really respond to 911 calls. We want to make sure there is ready assistance if needed. We also want to make sure there is no impropriety during our meetings with students, and keeping the door open during our advising meetings seems the best way to ensure that does not become a potential problem.

I remember one time I went to a meeting with a young male professor in his office while I was working on a Master’s degree in another department in graduate school. I walked in and started to close the door. He told me to “Please leave it open.” I found the request awkward, given the fact that the chair I was sitting in was right next to the open door. I felt like everyone walking by the office could hear our conversation. It made the discussion uncomfortable as he wanted to discuss my dedication to a paper I was writing, and I kept wondering who was listening out in the

hallway. It left a bad taste in my mouth about the meeting and about him, but I also reflected that someone must have told him, as a single, male professor, not to close the door during meetings with female students. Now in my own office, I find myself making similar decisions, and probably for similar reasons. It is not until I have met with a student a few times that I will ask if they want to close the door if it seems appropriate.

Lola, too, regularly asks students to leave the door open during appointments, “unless there is some reason they need to close the door.” She is unable, off the top of her head (and like the rest of us), to think of what such a reason might be. Preston will close his door most of the way, but leave it cracked “just a little. . .just in case.” I have also had the experience of asking students to please leave the door open when they start to close it. “Are you going to start to cry?” I joke. “If you’re going to cry you can close the door.” Sometimes students will ask us if they can close the door, and we all cringe a little. We agree that we usually allow them to close the door. We have all had the experience of asking for more information. Sometimes we say “No.” “Is it okay if I close the door?” they ask. “No, you can leave it open” we reply. What are they going to say? What if—none of us can really fill in the blank to know what we are worried about, but we definitely all feel the potential, yet unidentified, threat to personal and professional well-being.

Unrolling the Rugs

Ironically, none of us can think of a single story of something “bad” that happened as a result of a closed door during an advising meeting, but we all still worry that “one day...” something might happen. We also acknowledge that none of

us have ever had a conversation with a supervisor who suggested that we should leave the door open. All of us except Penn, however, agree that we always prefer to leave the door open when we meet with students. Given the nature of her department and the students with whom she interacts, closing her door is not as much of an issue for Penn, and she acknowledges that it has never concerned her to have students do so.

The rest of us wonder aloud about our feelings on this subject. It is intriguing that we literally are hiding behind an open-door policy. Corey (2005) reminds us that, like counselors, we may “lose [ourselves] in [our] fixed role and hide behind a professional façade” (p. 29), and fail to connect with our students this way. It seems possible, but not necessarily realistic. We all stress that we work hard to try to create relationships with our students, so then why would we intentionally place such a physical barrier in the way of that connection? What does leaving the door open signal to students, and to ourselves, that a closed door does not?

We acknowledge that we hide our unnamed fear in plain sight, and within the sight of others. What does it say about the truthfulness of our engagement with students as we open up our conversation in perhaps an unexpected, and somewhat intrusive way? What is the experience of being exposed? Students may feel exposed in light of the open door, and advisors feel exposed with a door that is closed. The need to breach the chasm is sometimes awkward, although we, as advisors, do find some comfort as we discuss our shared feelings about this topic. Still, in our preferred method of engagement, we lean toward self-preservation, and make it a truly open advising experience.

It might benefit us, however, to remember that what feels safe for us may ultimately threaten our students. A student who perceives that an open door means exposing their personal conversation to anyone in the hallway might feel as I did many years ago, frustrated and turned off. They might not feel comfortable opening up to conversation, and it might create an atmosphere where students feel unable to engage. It certainly would not welcome them to return if they ever needed to talk about personal issues. As Corey (2005) reminds us, “. . . We serve as models for our students. . . . [We] do not hide behind masks, defenses, sterile roles, and facades” (pp. 17-18). Subsequently, being aware of our concerns as advisors, yet respecting the privacy needs of our students, would seem to be an important step in creating the relationships we want to have with them.

Reaching Into the Attic

It is an interesting dilemma for academic advisors, whether or not to expose ourselves with a closed door or expose our students with a door that is open. We sense that there is some deep-seated fear that lies inside all of us, but cannot quite say what “it” is, or when it started. Through our group conversation, it occurs to us that we are risking the very relationships we value by insisting on our open door policies.

We recognize that, in all likelihood, we need to reconsider our commitment to our open doors or potentially risk alienating our students as we continue our work with them. As Ender and Wilkie (2000) remind us:

An interpersonal relationship between the student and advisor is essential. Trust and respect for one another must be established. Advisors may have to take some personal risks. . . . Advisors should consider themselves role models for their student advisees, emulating the life skills the students are exploring, learning, practicing, and refining. (p. 121)

It would seem that the very foundation of the trust which Ender and Wilkie (2000) describe would involve trusting our students not to make false accusations or threaten our professional roles. Searching out the reasons behind our preference for keeping the door open has proven elusive, as is often found with what we deem “instinct.” As Levin (1989) reminds us:

We are called into question by our listening; we are tested by what we hear; we can be accused by what we do not hear. There are ways in which we are responsible to others, responsible to humanity, for the character of our responsiveness as beings capable of listening and hearing. We are responsible for creating social spaces in which the voices of truth can be heard; we are responsible for opening up social spaces in which truth can be spoken: spoken and not shouted, spoken without fear of punishment or reprisal, spoken without shame. (p. 137)

The exploration of our own perceived underside of the “open door” policy we employ will certainly continue as we explore our own feelings of involvement and engagement within the academic advising relationship. For, as Gadamer (1975/2000) reminds us, “Partiality now means only an individual limitation of understanding” (p. 278).

Building for Continuous Improvements

Thus, it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself up to the other. (Gadamer, 1975/2000, p. 385)

One thing that we find we all have in common as advisors is our true enjoyment of interacting with other people. We continue to grow through our student interactions as we invite them to share our space, and we also enjoy developing our professional relationships and contacts. We spend a lot of time building our relationships with our students and colleagues, cultivating relationships that can sometimes transcend the professional into the personal. Our university offers an

annual advising conference for professional development and interaction. We have monthly happy hours where we interact. We have a wide array of professional outreach opportunities available for developing our approaches to academic advising, and there are numerous teaching opportunities to expand our interactions with students.

We want to make a difference because, ultimately, we like working with people. There is tremendous professional fulfillment in our personal commitment to interpersonal interactions. Baxter-Magolda (1998) explores our ability to help students establish “self-authorship” through such informal interactions and through our “expertise in integrating students’ interpersonal and intrapersonal development in learning-oriented educational practice” (p. 144).

Calling in the Experts

All of the conversants acknowledge that when they started advising they did not necessarily think of it as a “profession.” It was a job, a skill, part of “other responsibilities as assigned.” Yet as we now understand our actual role, and what the title “academic advisor” entails, we recognize that there is a tremendous amount of information that is available to us as “professional academic advisors.” We do not all like the idea of “professional development” surrounding academic advising. Some of us welcome these opportunities, and others dread, and avoid them.

Of the advisors who came together for our conversations, Preston uses professional development opportunities the most to find new ways to connect with students. He gives students in his learning community his cell phone number, and works to try to build friendships with students so he is someone they can trust. He

tries to get involved in different campus activities, including leading a Spring Break Service Project and teaching a leadership development class. He believes these will provide additional opportunities to connect with his students. We all express admiration for his outreach and commitment to really getting to know each of his students, and re-mind ourselves of the reasons we first entered the profession of doing academic advising.

Academic advising relationships are a work in progress. Every day brings a different set of students with different needs, expectations, and challenges. We simultaneously work toward the development of self and the development of others. We share bonds with one another in our commitments to helping, to caring, to building, to creating, and we search out opportunities to share the triumphs and failures that make up our daily routines.

Encountering the Light Down the Hall

Despite our engagement with our jobs as academic advisors, we also all recognize that it is not a lifelong commitment. Some of us have added to our job descriptions to expand our portfolios to include administrative responsibilities in addition to our advising. All of us have thoughts about the “next step” in our lives after academic advising, although we don’t have a timetable for when that might occur. Some of us feel we have “done all I possibly can” in our positions, and we recognize that a next step is necessary. Some of us feel the pressure of working with students pushing us toward our limits, and realize that the time for a transition is probably not far away. Some of us reluctantly recognize that academic advising is a somewhat stagnant position, and that no promotion or job advancement is readily

available without taking on a different job title. One of us is ready to pursue a Ph.D. and knows that means leaving a full time position to concentrate on the degree. Yet, when pushed, no one is able to say for certain when, or even if, such changes will occur. We all recognize our commitment to doing academic advising goes beyond a job title. As Diana explains, “A lot of times I’ll take the meetings I’ve had with students home. . . . I’ve wondered how long I’ll be able to do this.” It is a constant battle to leave work at work, to let the good experiences replace the not-so-good experiences in our meetings with students, and to remind ourselves that we are facilitators, not actualizers.

What is the experience of sharing the lived experience of doing academic advising? What are the meanings that emerge about the nature of the phenomenon of academic advising? What is the pedagogical value of such an exploration? In Chapter Five, I move beyond the essence of the phenomenon, to make meaning of what I have learned. I engage in the phenomenon of academic advising as a “possible human experience” in order to discover the phenomenon’s “universal character” (van Manen, 2003, p. 58).

CHAPTER FIVE: ENVISIONING THE COMPLETED STRUCTURE

Standing Back and Taking in the View

Everything you draw when drawing plans for a home, whether it is a sketch or a carefully detailed and scaled drawing, is considered to be an *original*. (Curran, 1979, p. 192)

Upon completing the building, the builder finally is able to step back and take in the whole of what has been created, and the architect has the satisfaction of seeing her plans come to fruition. While engrossed in the actual process of building, the vision was somewhat narrowly focused on the task at hand. There was not much time to step back, no ability to be able to take in the big picture. There were unasked questions and unknown answers. Now, despite potential unknowns being unanswered, the final product exists and can be addressed directly.

Certainly, there is a wondering, an internal inquiring about choices made and the potential consequences of those choices. There is the slightest feeling of doubt that perhaps the road taken was not the correct one. However, this questioning is critical to the experience of building a house. Options are presented, commitments are made, and decisions implemented. Sometimes, mistakes are made. The questioning allows us to complete, to finish, to take in, and to move forward. It is important to recognize how all the various decisions, choices and commitments are able to unite in becoming a unified whole. As Jacobson et al. (1990) discover:

From a distance, even as you squint to see it, [the good house] can be recognized as an entity, a specific thing. It is not just part of the environment; rather, it has a presence, like a recognized face in a crowd. (p. 73)

As I continue my own dwelling within the building of this phenomenological exploration, I recognize that it has resulted in far more than just a consideration of

what makes up “good advising” or “bad advising.” It asks much more than just what students want or do not want from their advisors, and what academic advisors “should” and “should not” do in order to be effective. This encourages me to re-turn to the orienting question of my research: **What is the lived experience of doing academic advising?**

Taking In the New-ness

Throughout this exploration, I have been both advisor and student. I have shared my experiences and knowledge with my students just as I have engaged with other advisors and asked them to share their experiences and knowledge with me. For the past eighteen months I have immersed myself in the process of learning what it means to “transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence” (van Manen, 2003, p. 36). I have turned from advisor to advisee, seeking information, knowledge, understanding, and essence. I turn toward my thirteen years of advising experience, hoping I have learned enough, asked enough, listened enough, absorbed enough. As van Manen (2003) tells us:

Phenomenology, like poetry, intends to be silent as it speaks. It wants to be implicit as it explicates. So, to read or write phenomenologically requires that we be sensitively attentive to the silence around the words by means of which we attempt to disclose the deep meaning of our world. (p. 131)

Through this process it becomes, as a part of this final turning, important to consider the pedagogical implications of this ongoing journey. In so doing, I am able to explore the nature of doing academic advising beyond the policies and rules that define the position, beyond the “blanks” on the advising forms that are used, beyond the credits and the classes which students accumulate during our time together. I also discover that the commitment to creating relationships within advising is instinctual,

something that cannot be taught, but must, instead, be lived. I have uncovered that the experience of doing academic advising is, at its very foundation, a shared one between advisor and student, wherein both engage wholly and truthfully with the other in order to move forward together. Additionally, a hermeneutical consideration of the lived experience of doing academic advising introduces numerous changes and realities for those who engage in it, both advisors and students.

Finishing Touches

Clearly, we may feel more or less at home in the world if, and only if, we are in the world. . . . The difference between home and world is not merely linguistic in nature. [They] simply exclude one another. Home is the part of reality that we hedge from the onslaught of exterior elements. . . . Home is defined by a limit. (Brague, 1996, p. 95)

As new voices emerge throughout the process of hermeneutic phenomenology, the sharing of conversations and understandings of experiences of the academic advisors allow for the continuation of be-coming through advisors' experiences of students. Van Manen (2003) emphasizes the "critically oriented action research" (p. 154) that underlies hermeneutic phenomenology. The phenomenological process helps to make a difference in people who are affected by insights found in the study; academic advisors and, ultimately, students will most certainly benefit from the improved advising relationships.

We are interested in pedagogic competence because we realize that it is not enough to bring children into the world and to love them, or to accept a job as a teacher and to lecture about history or science. We also have to be able to help the child grow up and give shape to life by learning what is worthwhile knowing and becoming. So we are interested in competence because we want to know what to do and we want to be able to distinguish what is good and what is not good . . . as pedagogues we must act, and in acting we must be true to our calling. (van Manen, 2003, p. 158)

As academic advisors, our ability to engage with our students through the process of academic advising requires an ultimate stepping back if we are to explore the underlying nature of the relationships between advisors and students. Just as the builder must begin with plans, with “some system for keeping spaces in correct relative proportion to each other” (Curran, 1979, p. 10), academic advisors must also establish confidence in their abilities to move beyond the surface conversations, to allow themselves to invest fully in the advising process. As Light (2001) identifies, “Part of a great college education depends on human relationships . . . there is agreement that the best advising is tailored to each undergraduate’s unique situation” (p. 85).

We, as advisors, know that we must expand our own visions for what is possible for our students, and allow our students to develop their own visions both for themselves, and for us and the advising relationship. As Taylor (1991) explains, Heidegger “regarded teaching as an exalted activity, a craft that can only take place when the teacher is more teachable than the students. . . . Teaching is even more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn” (p. 351). This rings true for advising as well. We must be willing to open ourselves up to different experiences and interpretations, to different approaches and understandings of the same reality. As previously discussed, we learn to “listen through” what is being said in order to find additional meanings, and to enable us to pursue additional conversations. As Flickinger (1992) reminds us,

. . . What is heard depends on who is listening. And the way we listen depends on the way we stand in the world. How we listen depends on the relationship we have with the one to whom we are listening. (p. 186)

It is through the exploration of those varied realities that the true advising relationship is created and maintained, and within which the advising relationship can develop. It re-minds us that our own position is an equal presence to that of the student; we cannot advise from experience without acknowledging that an experience exists.

We acknowledge our attempts to challenge our own senses of what feels comfortable, safe, and even easy as we move toward our understanding of an-other. We then intentionally aim our advising to encourage our students to take calculated risks, even when we might not take them ourselves. We step back from the details to absorb the whole of our students' lives in trying to figure out what "works," and being able to think through with them what might not work.

By revealing, and reveling in, the fundamental ideology that "It takes two to tango," we are able to approach the situations we face as academic advisors with the foundational supports that create dualistic growth and learning. Our acknowledgement and acceptance of the necessary "turning toward an-other" underlies the concrete nature of the advising relationship. This, then, allows for the pedagogical leanings to reveal themselves through such an exploration in order to, as van Manen (2003) suggests, see it as "a sign of our preoccupation with a certain question or notion, a demonstration of the strength of our exclusive commitment to the pedagogy that animates our interest in text in the first place" (p. 138).

Turning Toward An-Other

My conversations with other professional advisors unearthed that the very foundation of academic advising is centered around a "turning toward an other" in the advising relationship. In bringing forward their own experiences of doing academic

advising, the advisors have shown that the relationship between them and their students is definitely a two-way street. Both advisor and student turn toward the other, opening up, sharing in the journey that creates the building which comes to house the college experience. The advisors offer a supportive ear, a gentle manner, a direct truth in their engagement with the students whom they encounter, and in so doing, turn toward the shared building that is academic advising.

As Jacobson et al. (1990) find:

Just as materials can be deceptive—so can the structure of a building be opaque to our understanding. With enough metal connectors and hold-downs, the structural engineer can make almost any house buildable, no matter how structurally insensitive the design. But it is also possible to design buildings that look solid, houses that visually explain how they gain their strength to stand. (p. 71)

In sharing their experiences with students, the advisors find that the desire to reach out to students and have their students respond in kind is innate, an unconscious approach to the need to forge a common experience. As Preston encourages during our group conversation, “Don’t be afraid to let them in on your story. It helps in building the relationship.” Hultgren (1991) explains, “To create such an opening I must feel that which is being opened up” (p. 167). As academic advisors search for commonalities, issues about which they can create a conversation with their students, they move beyond which classes the students need and what remains between them and graduation. As hooks (1994) suggests, “I want to have a phrase that affirms the specialness of those ways of knowing rooted in experience . . . often experience enters the classroom from the location of memory” (pp. 90-91). We actively draw on our own experiences to help create the experiences of our students, and through our

turning toward “an other,” we attempt to help them to define and create those journeys.

In considering her creation of shared experiences with students, Diana recalls:

It takes some time but after asking maybe the right questions, I can usually get to the root of the student’s stress and get answers for them. I like when the light bulb goes on over both me AND the student when we understand the real problem.

Similarly, Michelle often draws on her own experiences of feeling “very rushed, hurried” and of “having no real idea of what I wanted to do” when she started college. Through her own battles, Michelle is able to relate to the struggles of her students, and actively aims to “meet students on their own level” of understanding and experience. Penn recognizes the duality in the relationship, as well. Advising, for her, is “larger than just the moment when I’m sitting across the desk from a student . . . my experience is being present. Being an advisor allows me those other experiences.”

We find that our occupation, and our pre-occupation, is destined to be encountered with “an-other” as we require an “other” to engage. As we engage with an other, we open ourselves up to them, and they to us. Heidegger (1959/1971) writes that “Something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us” (p. 57). It enables us to seek out those transformative elements, and make them our own. As Neal (1994) discovered, “The ‘claims’ made by the experience had the power to reshape the learning experiences and transform our existence” (p. 130). We go in search of experiences to help us perform such renovations, even as we complete the house of an-other.

We also are reminded that a good house is based on the essential foundation of nuts and bolts. We must not lose sight of the fact that the “big picture” for students

demands that the “little picture” is automatically addressed. The nuts and bolts of filling in audits, making sure that boxes are checked and blanks filled in, are not the glamorous tasks that make advisors come to work everyday. However, they are a critical part of the “doing” of academic advising. It does not matter how much my students like me if I fail to inform them of the requirements they still need to complete for graduation.

This requires us to engage with an-other around their needs, instead of our own. Sometimes, just filling in the blanks and making sure the boxes are checked is enough for students. They are perfectly content to build their own house, with little outside input. Indeed, most of my conversants and I rarely did more than just “check-in” with an advisor while we were undergraduates. We did not engage in the conversations and relationships that we now value as professional advisors. It is an intriguing paradox that we now seek to establish relationships as advisors that we did not look for, or even know about, as students.

Turning Toward the Pedagogy

As I move toward a deeper understanding of the phenomenon with which I am engaged, I recognize the value of van Manen’s (2003) reminder to educators about the “[need] to inquire (reflect, speak, write) in a manner that is both *oriented* and *strong* in a pedagogic sense” (p. 138). He suggests that the whole purpose of such human science research is to discover “the way we stand pedagogically in life” (van Manen, p. 138). It encourages us to seek the place of the other in order to hear more clearly the students’ voices, and upon which to act more responsively on their behalf.

Academic advising, as exhibited in the individual focus on each student, on each conversation, on each “opening up” of experience and understanding, is grounded in the very notion of van Manen’s (2003) pedagogical expectations, the “*theory of the unique*, of the particular case” (p. 150). For, despite the tendency of the academy to want to base academic advising on the exploration of various theories of student development and self-efficacy, advising is really a human interaction, based on the interchange between those who engage in the conversation.

There has been little attempt to pose the question of the nature of pedagogy, to dialogue about the meaning of pedagogy in our everyday lives. Where should we attempt to find the location or the space where pedagogy may be seen to reside? . . . Can pedagogy be observed? Can it be experienced? What does it mean to ask for the nature of pedagogy in this way? (van Manen, 2003, pp. 142-143)

This challenge of pedagogical commitment and understanding for academic advisors requires both self-awareness and other-awareness. We are reminded that such awarenesses mean that we must respond to “this call for flexibility and mixture of skill types [to respond to] institutional change and evolving student expectations” (Reinarz, 2000, p. 210). We must know that our awareness is based on our recognition of the temporary nature of the calling, and that each advising relationship has formally defined beginning and more informally defined ending places. It allows us to seek opening and closing moments in the experience, so each meeting can be self-contained, until the next one.

Michelle and Diana have established clear expectations for the nature of their advising relationships since students who see them for advising have alternate options within the office. They “share” themselves with their students, engaging in a turning toward other in a dynamic relationship that allows for mutual growth and

understanding. They aim to forge a conversation in order to develop the necessary dialogue of engagement. Penn and Preston are a “one-stop shop” for their students. Since there is no other advisor who is available to advise their students, they can expect to see their students again, and again, until graduation. They do not, however, think of this as easy. They know the importance of being able to pick up the strands of a conversation last held six months ago, of needing to recall the specific details that might mean success or failure for the student. Lola has a specific learning community that she knows she will see regularly, but then when the students move on, and occasionally come back, she too needs to quickly find the foundations upon which the original conversation was built. As she explains, “This is a large campus and students can really get lost in the red tape and hoops that they have to jump through. I [try] to recall my own experiences and not [forget] what it was like to be an undergraduate.” I, too, previously wrote of my concern with forgetting my students. How can I hope to form a relationship with someone whom I do not remember? To have to continually re-new a relationship might seem to undermine it. However, it does allow us to underline the nature of defining “other” within the context of remembering, experiencing, and engaging through the process of academic advising.

Reaching Beyond the Borders

In the last twenty years or so, the concept of design has broadened. We have begun to see cultural evolution as an informal, collective, generational process of design. . . . It is questionable how far in this direction we ought to go. We risk ignoring or underestimating significant differences. . . . But we may also discover, at a deeper level, a generic design process which underlies these differences. (Schön, 1983, p. 77)

Recent considerations about the nature of academic advising show that the profession is at once divided and expanding. Much of the research continues to focus

on the “how to” of advising, and the “who to” for referrals that go beyond the boundaries of the academic advisors’ professional portfolios. Yet, institutions are also recognizing the importance of academic advising, and are demonstrating it by placing responsibility for student development and success within the realm of newly created and recently expanded student affairs offices found within traditional academic affairs units, a chasm which has only recently been bridged. The gap between teaching and advising is narrowing, yet the distinction is still being articulated. As Lowenstein (2005) asserts, “In the process of developing an account of learning-centered advising, I show that the paradigm allows the advisor’s role to be elevated to a position of the utmost importance in higher education” (p. 65).

Needless to say, the reality of the lives of academic advisors does not reflect Lowenstein’s optimistic view of our value and contribution to the institutions within which we are employed. However, Lowenstein (2005) does suggest that an “excellent advisor does the same for the student’s entire curriculum that the excellent teacher does for one course” (p. 69). He stresses understanding the curriculum as a whole is identical to understanding the syllabus for one course. It allows for a connection between “doing” student affairs with students and academic affairs with academics. It allows for a joint creation, a collaborative building up of the concrete explanation between theory and practice of and for students and advisors.

However, it is also important to consider that not only are advisors and teachers, we are also students. We are students of lives, our own and those of others. We are students of our institutions, and their ever-expanding graduation guidelines and student success expectations. We are students of the world, as it continues

changing the nature of our relationship with our own students through the creation of voicemail and e-mail and Instant Messaging and text messages and online audits. And, we are students of each other, as we join together for professional development conferences and sessions to encounter new ideas and people and activities in which we might engage. The learning aspect of our role of academic advisor is critical to the formation of our sense of “self” that we bring to our students.

Thus, academic advising as a pedagogical consideration can be found to be multi-dimensional in the exploration of the dynamic between advisor and student, advisor and teacher, and teacher and student. Indeed, such a consideration is found in our response-ability for ourselves within each role, both individually and collectively. As van Manen (2003) reminds us to ask, “What is the significance of theorizing and research and scholarly thought if they absolutely fail to connect with the bodily practices of everyday life?” (p. 148).

In order to explore this expectation, this need that van Manen poses, academic advisors must, as a process, explore the nature of our ability to encounter our students, our “other.” We must broaden our avenues for reaching out to students, to parents, and to other “helping” professionals. We must actively bridge the gap between counseling and advising, and we must clarify some of the opaqueness that surrounds higher educational policy and procedure.

Re-envisioning Turning’s Essence

Several years ago I discovered the “back roads” that take me from where I live to the airport. Taking these roads, although a bit rolling, saves a lot of time and mileage on the trip. When I first started driving along the roads, they were relatively

empty, save for some older neighborhoods and some farms. Today, however, they are building several new neighborhoods with tremendously large houses.

I am a big fan of big houses. I love the style and the size, the décor and the design, and the choices and options that are available to the very wealthy. I am sometimes an admirer and sometimes aghast about the choices that have been made. I have been eagerly watching the neighborhoods grow up along the “back roads.” Every few months as I drive to the airport, I look forward to seeing how the different houses are progressing. I nod in approval and shake my head in dismay as the houses develop before me. “The houses are so close together!” “Oooh, nice gazebo” It is the uniquenesses of each builder’s choice, of each owner’s desire, of each architect’s design that leads to my experience of their dream.

This experience reflects upon the essence of doing academic advising. Each choice, each decision, each option lays open a wide variety of additional choices, decisions, and options. As soon as the student sits down in the advisor’s office, the building begins. Through collaboration and conferrals, through consideration and referrals, the foundation of the academic advising relationship is set, and the essence confirmed.

How can such a moment confirm the necessary “turning toward an other?” As Baxter Magolda (2000) reminds us:

Educators cannot possibly know the backgrounds, unique experiences, and developmental journeys of every student they encounter. Recognizing, however, that these backgrounds, unique experiences, and developmental journeys mediate learning necessitates finding ways to access students’ meaning-making to promote learning more effectively. (p. 93)

Academic advisors encounter students within their own sense of place, an actual re-place-meant of their lived experiences. Just as we wish to have our relationships with our students be meaning-full, we also wish to feel use-full to each other. Being able to assert the nature of the advising relationship as a shared experience, a true engagement with an-other, allows for the continued growth and sound construction of this dynamic partnership.

Eclectic Choices

By engaging in a phenomenological exploration of lived experience with my conversants, I have learned much about the nature of doing academic advising that my many years of experience may never have brought me. We discussed our triumphs and failures, and have come to understand a little more about the lofty dreams and crushing realities that we, and our students, can face. Through our conversations I have expanded my own repertoire of advising tricks and tools, my own understanding of the nature of the advisor-student relationship, and the role of the institution in that relationship. We have given voice to the experiences that often go unshared, unstated, and which often remain unavailable. It has been a life-altering experience, both professionally and personally.

Now it is time for me to step back from my own building, and to take in that which has been created. How has this process of phenomenological questioning and exploration impacted me as a researcher? As a continuing professional advisor? Noddings (1984) encourages me to remember “Intuition’s ability to initiate meaning, then, is partially dependent on the thing to which meaning will be attached” (p. 53). I have come to realize that often I advise by instinct, seemingly unencumbered by

much intentional consideration of student development theory or “best practices” as designed by the profession of which I am a part. I remember that I do make meaning, both for myself, and for (and with) my students through my be-ing with them as an academic advisor. As Heidegger (1962/1967) explains, this hermeneutical process has opened up my ability to grasp my own possibilities for being in the world in a certain way, and it allows me to use my text as the foundation for understanding what can come forth from it.

Because “understanding is, in the end, always possible” (Gadamer, 1975/2000, p. 218), it is important to try to fully discover the essence found in the phenomenological endeavor in which I have been engaged. Gadamer asserts that we cannot separate ourselves from the text’s meaning. I recognize that there is a “lasting meaning that an experience has for the person who has it . . . however the notion of experience also implies a contrast between life and mere concept ” (pp. 66-67). We must step back, we must take in, we must absorb if we are to be “it.”

What does the building portend for the builder? As Lawlor (1997) suggests, “The rooms and furniture of your home are more than a mere collection of isolated objects. They are tangible nurturers of soul . . . the force that animates our thoughts, words, and actions” (p. 23). I have advised so many students, in so many rooms, at so many different times in their lives. I have advised old students and young students, academically talented students and academically challenged students, intellectually thoughtful students and practical, give-it-to-me-straight students. They have made up the rooms of my building, just as I am helping them to create the rooms in theirs. They have created my response and my reality.

I see that I have come to define myself in this way, through each student's journey, through each window and cupboard and closet. They have become a part of who I am, my soul-full nature as an academic advisor. I realize that each structure they create is absorbed into my own, and that each journey intertwines with that of an-other. As I reflect on my shared building of the college experience through my various advising sessions with Josh, and Nicki, and Cherisse, and Brian, I realize that each of their houses has become a part of the tool kit that I carry with me in my encounters with others. It unifies us all in this way. Through the opening up shared with my conversants, Diana, Preston, Penn, Lola, and Michelle, we have shown that the journey is necessarily one of sharing, of joining together in shared information and ideas, and of committing to an-other. It is the essence at its core, the dwelling between one and an-other.

The Advisor's Re-turn

How do I enter the question? . . . The question I began with is now being returned to me as I seek a point of re-entrance through a reflection on the text of our group, and see the idea of *relationship* central in coming to understand the nature of the question. (Hultgren, 1991, p. 165)

Throughout the process of writing this phenomenological exploration, there were good times and bad times. I found that when I was feeling good about myself as an advisor, the words and thoughts flowed freely, and when I was feeling particularly challenged or frustrated about my position, I was completely unproductive, ignoring my research and the pile of books in my living room and bedroom for weeks, even months, at a time. I acknowledged this even as it was occurring, and was devastated when a couple of students complained about their experiences with me to my supervisor. Clearly the connections that I had always prided myself on were fraying,

if not broken altogether. I did not want to come home and think about the experience of doing academic advising when I was not sure I liked the experience very much anymore.

I struggled to go to work everyday, experiencing it more as a “job” than I ever had before. I was not connected, not connecting, and not interested in making the effort to reach out toward an-other. I filled out the paperwork, lifted the blocks, and sent students on their way.

Turning in a New Direction

I decided to change my dissertation topic. I thought about writing a dissertation about the phenomenological experience of writing a dissertation. My advisor gently dissuaded my enthusiasm for this topic, explaining that in order to write into something from a phenomenological perspective, I needed to have had that experience. I could not write about something I had not yet done. Oh.

I finally realized that I was feeling the “seven year itch” a year early. There was a lot of change in my office: new advising assignments, three new people who doubled the size of our office, a more stream-lined process for advising, and new procedures for filling out the forms and evaluating the kind of advising that students were receiving. I did not feel fulfilled, or fulfilling. I felt like a checkpoint, a stop along the route to graduation, rather than a partner in the journey toward home. I knew that I either needed to leave the position, or find a way to make the new expectations work for me. I needed to rediscover the everyday joy that started me along this road as an academic advisor. I needed to re-turn to that which I found fulfilled me, and hope that it would hold meaning for my students as well.

Defining the Re-turning

The re-turn started simply. My supervisor told me that she had some professional development money and we needed to “use it or lose it.” She encouraged me to find a conference to attend. The National Association of Academic Advisors (NACADA) is the national professional organization for academic advisors, and it holds different regional conferences in the spring and a national conference in the fall. I looked at where my regional conference was being held, and was disappointed in the Lancaster, Pennsylvania location. Since my brother had recently moved to Lancaster, I had already been there and it did not hold much appeal for me. I looked at the list of other regional conferences, and noted one in Albuquerque, New Mexico. New Mexico is one of only five states that I have never been to, so it was an appealing site. Then, at the bottom of the list of conferences, I saw the one I wanted to attend: Honolulu, Hawaii. I had been to Hawaii twice before, but if I could attend a professional conference there I knew it would be a great excuse to visit again.

I called NACADA to inquire about whether I could attend a regional conference other than my own, and they confirmed I could. Then I broached the topic with my supervisor to see whether she would support my going to Honolulu instead of Lancaster. She suggested that I needed to have a reason why Honolulu was a better professional development opportunity for me, stressing the “professional” concept. Fortunately, the theme of the Honolulu conference, “Advising All Learners” was much better suited to our office’s new direction than the Lancaster conference theme, “Advising as Teaching.” She mentioned the idea to the Dean, who did not seem opposed to it.

Then, on a whim, and to ensure that I could actually be financially supported for this trip, I decided to submit a conference proposal. “Exploring Your Passion and Paying Your Bills: Advising Into the Future With Liberal Arts Students” was the title of my proposed presentation, and I was thrilled when I received the notification that it had been accepted. Even though both my supervisor and the dean had already approved my trip, it seemed to validate my reason for going. I actually was going to present at my first professional conference, and it was going to be in Hawaii! I was thrilled at the opportunity.

Since I was scheduled for a 9:00 a.m. session on the first day of the conference, I was sure I would have about ten people in attendance, and I brought twenty copies of my materials “just in case.” Imagine my surprise when over 70 people attended my presentation, and my satisfaction at having the conference organizers pulling in extra chairs so that people who wanted to be there could be accommodated. It was tremendously satisfying. Even more satisfying was attending the other sessions with people who are just as passionate and dedicated as I am, and learning new ideas and new techniques for engaging in conversations with our different student populations. The trip was exactly what I needed to rediscover my joy and confidence in my role of academic advisor. My re-turning to the role I had rediscovered allowed me to engage wholly with my students and my colleagues with an energy I had not felt in quite a long time.

My subsequent re-turn enable me to submit, and have accepted, a proposal to present at the national conference last fall. I definitely found the connection I had been looking for, and I re-turned to my students the care and commitment that their

journey deserves. My inner connection to their building was renewed and revitalized. I can feel the energy again when I meet with students, and am fully present with them and for them as we engage in the process of building their academic house. I am rewarded by their smiles and words of appreciation, their referrals to their friends, and their complimentary emails and comments to my supervisor. Truly, the foundations of my experiences as an academic advisor have been reinforced, and the re-turning is complete.

Turning Into Self

An adult's understanding of a child's experience has something to do with the way this adult stands in the world. (van Manen, 2003, p. 137)

This symbolic housing of meaning and memory gives places temporal depth. But not only do places of experience store meaning about the past; they also are platforms for visions and plans about the future. (Platt, 1996, p. 112)

Throughout my conversations with my conversants nothing rang more truly or more loudly than the dedication of the advisors to their jobs and to their students. However, during the group conversation, while we all readily acknowledged finding tremendous satisfaction, fulfillment, and even joy in valuing the connections we made with our students and with other advisors, we all admitted that we knew this was not our life-long calling. Preston wondered about how much more he could find in his job to challenge him after five years in his position. He admitted that sometimes the nonstop routine was boring. Lola admitted to being frustrated by her failure to advance professionally beyond her current position after being in it for nine years. Diana's sense of "doing right" by the student drains her tremendously, and she wonders how much more she can take after five years. She actively thinks about which student will finally put her "over the edge." Michelle expressed during our

individual meeting that this was a “right time and place” job for her, a place where she could have some flexibility while her children were young for the past two years. Among my conversants, Penn, alone, found that creating outside opportunities for professional development and advancing administratively with responsibilities outside of her advising role helped to keep her interested and involved after 17 years in a position that has evolved since she first took it.

Reconsidering Boundaries

I remember rather impetuously writing on my draft of the IRB application that one potential danger to my participants was that it might make them reconsider their professional career choices. It was somewhat ironic, then, when I found out that a couple of months after I completed my interviews two of my conversants did, in fact, resign from the university, leaving their advising positions for jobs outside of academia. When I talked to them about it they told me that they were increasingly frustrated with the “red tape” and the “never-ending policy changes that make no sense.” It sounded like the experience I had recently undergone as well. Like I had been, they felt unappreciated and underpaid in an office that hired several new supervisors and did not extend either of them the courtesy of even interviewing for the internal positions for which they had both applied. They talked about the expensive cost of parking, the long commute, and the hours that never end since the advent of email and Instant Messenger. They talked about feeling trapped, stuck, and stagnant in a position that really does not allow for upward mobility. They felt that they had ceased serving the needs of themselves and their students, and they decided to turn inward, away from the “other,” and to move on. They did not talk about

feeling drained by their interactions with their students. In fact, they both commented that they were going to “really miss the kids a lot,” and “have to make sure to keep in touch” with some of their students. Even as they were turning into themselves, they still valued their encounter with the other.

In their study of what students want from academic advising, Smith and Allen (2006) found that

It is interesting to note that the advising functions that some theorists would argue define the essence of developmental advising (i.e., knowing students as individuals; taking into account their skills, interests, and abilities; and encouraging them to assume responsibility for their education) were in the middle of the rankings. (p. 62)

Perhaps this discrepancy between the goals of academic advisors and the needs and expectations of the system that communicates with our students creates this sense among advisors that it is not a life-long career. At some point, there seems to be the feeling that we must turn into ourselves, both literally and figuratively, in order to remember who we are and what calls us.

Reconstructing Expectations

As Curran (1979) reminds us, “If revisions are made carefully, with skill and thought, the results can be quite satisfactory—even outstanding!” It seems that a revision of the perception and realities of roles academic advisors may be necessary in order to retain exceptional advisors over an extended period of time, and that such revisions are necessary at all levels of the institution. As Kerr (2000) argues, “On the surface, who could argue that advisors should not be recognized or rewarded for their efforts in providing advising to students at our institutions of higher learning?” (p. 349).

However, sometimes the gap between intent and reality can lead to disjointed reward, uneven appreciation, and limited recognition. The scarce resources faced by most institutions of higher learning simply do not allow for unending monetary rewards for advisors, and rarely can they make accommodations for additional space, additional time off, regular and funded participation in professional development opportunities, or “flex” time. In one recent conversation with an advisor, she said she had approached her supervisor about the opportunity to telecommute from home one day a week, suggesting that she could advise via chatroom and email for that day. Her supervisor told her that parents were not paying thousands of dollars for her to “sit at home playing on the computer.” She said she started looking for new jobs that day, believing that no matter how committed she was to her students, the institution would never be so committed to her. “I understood what it was to be expendable for the first time in my life, at that very minute. It really hurt.”

Kerr (2000) acknowledges, and my conversants all concur, that

Helping students navigate the educational pathways of our institutions, and the satisfaction and personal fulfillment they receive in watching students grow and develop as individuals, are enough [reward] for many people. However . . . extrinsic rewards for both the individual advisor and the institution are important because they make visible the importance of academic advising as an integral component of the infrastructure of the institution. (p. 352)

Such recognition and acknowledgement of commitment and effort and caring reinforce the nature of the “lived experience” for advisors who are, ultimately, the care-givers.

Revitalizing the Neighborhood

While collaboration can take many forms, building connections among academic affairs, student affairs, and support services seems to be an important route to retaining students and encouraging success. (Frost, 1991, p. 67)

Professional academic advising is relatively new as a function in higher education. According to Frost (1991), until relatively recently “Academic advising was not among the student services programs initiated to meet the needs of the growing post-World War II student population” (pp. 3-4). Rather, it was not until the 1970’s, “When falling enrollments and alarming attrition rates accompanied students’ demands for improved advising, [that] traditional advising received serious attention” (Frost, 1991, p. 4).

Since the initial call for improved academic advising, and the creation of NACADA in 1977, it speaks volumes that the “profession” of academic advising has only one professional organization. More troubling is that fact that it “now has over 9300 members representing all 50 states, Puerto Rico, Canada and several other international countries. Members represent higher education institutions across the spectrum of Carnegie classifications and include professional advisors/counselors, faculty, administrators and students whose responsibilities include academic advising” (<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/AboutNACADA/index.htm>). 9300 members would equal less than one advisor per college or university in this country alone. Obviously, there is a demonstrated need to continue developing the connections for and to academic advising.

There have been many calls for increased and ongoing collaboration within our colleges and universities over the years, yet we have made little progress toward these ends. Additionally, we are reminded that higher education does not, and cannot, function in a vacuum. As Teitelbaum (2000) suggests:

American colleges and universities are social institutions embedded in the general economy. Consequently, changes that are now reshaping American businesses and organizations inevitably influence higher education as well. . . . The unpredictable nature of the employment market will result in dramatically different working patterns in the future. . . . What [students] learn in college must therefore provide knowledge and competencies that are useful across occupational categories. (pp. 393, 395-396)

Additionally, Steele (2005) found that although distance learning opportunities are growing exponentially, meeting the changing needs of students attending school, the advising resources available for working with such students are sorely lacking. He suggests that as students increasingly turn to online education, we will need to work quickly to develop an advising system that responds to their needs. It would appear, therefore, that professional academic advising is at an important crossroads in terms of its access and support for students.

Accessing the Open Spaces

It is quite possible that in the foreseeable future the lived experience of academic advising will change dramatically as the United States continues transforming itself “from an industrial and agricultural environment to an information and service society” (Teitlebaum, 2000, p. 393). Our “call” as academic advisors will be altered with the times, and our focus will shift with the changing college student population. As Gordon (2000) finds:

As we contemplate the future of higher education and academic advising, we need to think creatively about how advising can serve the students . . . we

must plan for these changes with a proactive stance that anticipates and controls the change in a positive, beneficial way. (p. 381)

Society's own call increasingly seems to be "carpe diem," seize the day. Surely the need for academic advising appears to be even more important now than at any time previously, as our evolving society threatens to leave the hallowed traditions of our institutions of higher learning behind.

As advisors consider the moves which the building suggests, and possible moves which lie ahead, it seems a critical juncture to consider the next steps. This cultural transition we are undergoing as a nation, and within our colleges and universities, seems to be a good time to consider how to help and support advisors better as they do their jobs.

As I have previously mentioned, it is not possible to pick a major in college that will lead you directly to a career as an academic advisor. It is truly a calling, and often a searching about, that leads us toward and down this professional path. Each of my conversants shared their own very divergent journeys to their jobs as academic advisors, and yet we all feel bound by the same connection to our students, and our institution. We all feel the call of being the public face of policy for our students, recognizing that we may be the only administrator that a student will ever encounter during their four years in college. We also understand that we have grown from a job that used to be seen as "simplistic, routine, and perfunctory" to a job that is now a "complex process of student development requiring comprehensive knowledge skills, attitudes, and behaviors that can be learned and enhanced" (King, 2000, p. 289). It increases the need for comprehensive, coordinated, and consistent training programs for and by advising professionals.

Through continued program development, support for professional development, and outreach by NACADA to each member institution, some much-needed strides can certainly be made. For example, NACADA embraces its “core values,” established in 1994, as assisting in “providing a framework against which those who advise can measure their own performance” (Gordon & Habley, 2000, p. 409). Logically, one might imagine that “measuring their own performance” would assume a certain level of awareness, both self-awareness and institutional-awareness, that it seems ignorant, even dangerous, to presuppose.

Just as the experience of doing academic advising with students is a developmental process, so, too, is the experience of becoming an academic advisor. It would seem that our professional organization’s guiding “core values” would seek to empower and support professional development, not presume we are all capable of engaging in such self-evaluation. NACADA needs to teach individual members and member institutions how to understand and apply these core values to their own situations. That makes them truly “guiding” values, instead of just expectations for members.

Additionally, my institution sponsors an annual advising conference for all professional advisors on campus. It used to charge a fee for attendance, so some departmental representatives and part-time advisors were excluded. Three years ago, however, the Undergraduate Dean and the Provost determined that the university would fully fund the conference, so all who serve in a professional advising capacity on campus can attend. This was a large stride forward in supporting the mission of professional advisors, as we were all able to come together, supported by our

administration, for outreach and understanding. Continued collaboration and support along these lines would be helpful, as three hour-long sessions held one day per year would not seem to meet the needs of continued professional development.

Such outreach and support is now critical, as we seek to

Assist students in making this foundational knowledge meaningful by helping them integrate academic, career, and life goals . . . advisors should provide an atmosphere of shared responsibility that considers students' individuality.

(Smith & Allen, 2006, p. 64)

So, too, should we remember that advisors also need to be provided with an atmosphere of shared responsibility that considers their individuality. It is, after all, a shared journey for us, as well.

Moving Into the Future

If we are truly to “meet the students where they are,” we must start to consider what steps we can take as a profession to prepare for the future, and begin to imagine what that future might look like. This can enable us to take a much-needed step forward to consider what the “doing” of academic advising should be, and must be, in order to serve our students.

First, we should start implementing “training programs” for academic advisors, equipping them with solid counseling and listening skills. This would mean re-valuing the academic advisor, both financially and professionally. The role of the professional academic advisor must be reconsidered, clearly distinguishing between the responsibilities and expectations of a temporary or part-time/graduate student position and a full-time, dedicated professional position.

As previously mentioned, although there is a one-day advising conference at the institution where I work (and which is more than many institutions offer their

advising professionals), it is not nearly enough to address the myriad challenges that we face every year with each new group of students. One suggestion might include requiring annual courses or seminars to keep advisors up-to-date on the changing dynamics of the student population. More than ever before, students who might not have attended college in previous generations are now able to attend. It is, therefore, essential that academic advisors be “up with the times,” fully aware of the academic, financial, and (as much as possible) mental health profiles for each entering class of new students. Additionally, more and more students are coming to four year schools after spending time at community colleges, which often have open enrollment policies. They are bringing a whole new set of learning needs with them, and the admissions policies of many four year state schools mandate these students must be accepted upon earning an Associate’s degree. Such mandates do not, however, address the extent or type of advising that is required to help acclimate such students.

Suggested topics for ongoing professional development, therefore, might include advising students in transition, advising students with learning disabilities, advising students with mental health disorders or students who are on psychotropic drugs, the impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act for advisors, and the impact of the Buckley Amendment on our interactions with “helicopter” parents. If advisors had a regular “schedule” of required and expected professional development, colleges and universities could better anticipate and respond to various issues that arise in student affairs institution-wide. Merit pay increases could reward academic advisors who take advantage of such professional development opportunities, and serve as continued incentive for ongoing participation.

We should also work to create a community between our mental health counselors and our academic advisors, encouraging collaboration instead of competition. We must realize that a holistic approach to advising our students means a holistic approach to educating our advisors. We also need to find ways of incorporating our learning specialists into our advising interactions with students, rather than retreating behind the artificial boundaries found in job descriptions. The open door policy needs to work both ways, between and within the institution that is serving the students.

There is an acknowledged tension between the counseling “professionals,” who require a degree and certification in order to “treat” students, and academic advisors, who often simply need a Master’s degree in any field relevant to what they are advising. Counseling is a destination, and advising is a journey. The divide is a wide one, but if the field is truly to move forward, that chasm must be breached. Advisors must invite and incorporate counseling professionals into their training, and counseling centers on campuses should provide liaisons for advising offices for times when advisors have questions and for helping students transition from advising services to counseling services.

There should also be a consistent, and dedicated, source of funding within our institutions for hiring and training academic advisors. If such hiring and training became an institutional priority, we would inevitably find more uniformity and collaboration in the establishment of various academic policies and procedures, less confusion and run-around, and more confidence in our approach toward helping and supporting our students.

Considering Potential Renovations

In addition to practical changes that can be made to address the needs of academic advisors, it also seems clear that we must re-evaluate the research literature that is currently being done. As I explored in Chapter Two, much of the current literature addresses the “expectations” placed on advisors, but does not consider their needs. There are many “how-to” suggestions that are made, but few considerations of what the implications might be of asking “why” we do what we do. Future research must consider the nature of the advisor-student relationship as a dynamic, ever-changing entity, which should not be limited to “tips” for being a good listener.

Future directions for professional research should include more “lessons learned” from professional advisors. There is much to be gained by exploring the first-person experiences of academic advisors, and creating a forum for sharing those experiences would be invaluable. In my own experiences with new, and even experienced advisors, I am struck by the number of times I have engaged in conversations that start with, “Can I ask you about this student situation that I had today?” I also remember that when I first started it was helpful to go to other advisors and say, “I wonder if I could get your suggestions about this scenario?” As a profession, we must embrace the first-person nature of our jobs, and reach out through our professional literature to one another. Our professional website and the monthly issue of the advising journal should have a “What would you do?” scenario for advising, whereby both “seasoned” and “rookie” advisors respond to various scenarios. Rather than prescriptive advising, it would open up a dialogue concerning best practices, which ultimately defines success within our field.

Another consideration for future research would be to define the goals of our profession within its various contexts. For example, currently, we tend to “clump” advisors for community colleges, small private schools, and large state universities together. The students who attend these institutions are different, and the professionals who work in them have different goals and needs, as well. Acknowledging and addressing those distinct, and changing, needs would allow a fuller perspective of the professionals who make up the field, and the diversity of experiences and relationships they encompass.

Celebrating the Settlement

Each sight and sound reconnects the fragments of dwelling to the whole. Experiencing the energy and intelligence in wood and stone, we touch the soul of existence. Hearing silence in brick and mortar, we partake of life’s silent core. Seeing light reflected in glass and steel, we become the light. . . . Ultimately we realize that the sacred in architecture is not “out there” but “in here.” (Lawlor, 1994, pp. 209-210)

After the building is complete, there is a final period of settlement for the home between completion and inhabitation. The last nails hammered, the last brick set, the house stands on its own, a concrete reflection of the journey of its creators and the dreams of those who will dwell there.

This research about the lived experience of doing academic advising has opened up a much-needed conversation about the experience of the actual *doing* of advising, as opposed to just “how to do” advising. It has connected theory and practice, administrative and personal issues, and institutional and individual elements in attempting to understand the calling that professional advisors experience in their relationships with their students. It has opened up meanings that both challenge and

encourage us in our encounters with an-other, as we strive to do more, mean more, and be more for ourselves and our students.

In considering the nature of doing academic advising, I have uncovered the dynamic interplay between doing and being as it relates to the experience of academic advising. My research has allowed access and insight into a commitment that has heretofore been unexamined, and certainly remains under-studied and undervalued. The experiences of my conversants surrounding their engagement with an-other has opened up avenues for additional research as it pertains to professional growth and support, as well as provided deep insight into the challenges we face within the profession, itself. As van Manen (2003) reiterates:

These four existentials of lived body, lived space, lived time, and lived relation to the other can be differentiated but not separated. . . . One existential always calls for the other aspects. (p. 105)

Such exploration re-minds us of our commitments, intentionally reconnecting us to one another in order to have us dwell further. As van Manen (2003) found with his study of childhood memory,

The house is the location of our shared *lived space*, the home. In the home and in its immediate environment the child is offered the opportunity to explore the world from a safe haven. (p. 106)

Inhabiting such a safe haven, one which has been created with and for our students and ourselves, allows us to encounter more fully “A special *lived relation to the other* in the sense that this relation is highly personal and charged with interpersonal significance” (van Manen, 2003, p. 106).

Through this phenomenological approach to the consideration of the lived experience of doing academic advising, I have aimed “To construct an animating,

evocative description of human actions, behaviors, intentions, and experiences as we meet them in the lifeworld . . . [in order to] seek universal meaning” (van Manen, 2003, p. 19). It recalls the hundreds, even thousands, of individual meetings that have brought forward a smile, a frown, even a perplexed look. Ultimately, it is this engagement, one with the other, that truly informs the study of human science. It is here where the true link connects us, advisor to student, experience to experience, generation to generation, human being to human being.

A home for the soul is not a final destination. It is a process of self-discovery that deepens over time. We may seek a dwelling place where stability and contentment are attained once and for all, but this does not seem to be the nature of a soulful life. As soon as one goal is achieved, a fresh desire arises. The pleasure of the soul appears to be found in the journey of discovery, the unfolding revelation of expanded insight and experience. (Lawlor, 1997, p. 218)

APPENDIX A

An Invitation to Participate

Paula F. Nadler
pnadler@wam.umd.edu

July, 2005

Dear Academic Advisor,

I am writing to invite you to engage in a study that explores the lived experience of academic advisors. I am conducting this study as a doctoral student in the Department of Education, Policy and Leadership, at the University of Maryland, College Park, under the direction of Dr. Francine Hultgren.

Although there has been a lot written on the “how-tos” of academic advising, the purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of academic advisors as they encounter students. As I seek to understand this experience, I will tape-record and transcribe two individual conversations, two group conversations, and will ask participants to engage in selected written reflections beginning in the Summer, 2005 and extending into the Fall, 2005 semester. You will not be identified by name in the published findings or in oral presentations, unless you choose to have your name revealed. You will, however, be invited to adopt an alias for the purposes of my writing. After the research is complete, you are more than welcome to review the results.

This study will make an important contribution to understanding the lived experiences of academic advisors and the relationships they establish with students as they progress through their undergraduate degree programs. The research will be considered successful if someone who knows nothing about academic advising reads the narratives you provide and understands the victories and defeats, the challenges and insights, and the special connections that come with academic advising.

I will be contacting you to set up our first individual meetings and finding a time to schedule our first group meeting. If you have any questions, please contact me. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this experience with me.

Sincerely,

Paula F. Nadler
Doctoral Candidate
Education Policy and Leadership
University of Maryland, College Park

APPENDIX B

Page 1 of 3
Initials _____ Date _____

CONSENT FORM

- Project Title:** Building Foundations: The Phenomenological Experience of Academic Advisors
- Why is this research being done?** This is a research project being conducted by Paula F. Nadler at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are currently employed as a full-time academic advisor serving an undergraduate student population. The purpose of this research project is to explore the experiences of academic advisors at a large state university. We hope to understand the nature of the relationships that advisors establish with their students as the students pursue and earn 4-year degrees.
- What will I be asked to do?** The procedures involve two individual conversations for 45-60 minutes, two group conversations for 60-90 minutes, and writing several (4-5) reflective journals. The study will begin during the Summer, 2005, and continue into the Fall, 2005 semester. All conversations will be taped and transcribed. We will meet in mutually convenient locations on or near campus. Participants will be asked to reflect on their advising experiences, the expectations they have for the students with whom they work, and the choices and decisions they make when advising students. Example questions include the following:
- What is your experience of academic advising?
 - What is your experience of exploring choices with students?
 - In what ways do you seek to empower students through your advising sessions?
 - In what ways do your encounters with students reflect your own experiences with advising during college?
 - What foundations for advising do you seek to establish throughout your advising meetings with students?

Project Title:	Building Foundations: The Phenomenological Experience of Academic Advisors
What about confidentiality?	<p>This research project involves making audiotapes of you during our conversations. Transcriptions of the audiotapes will then be made of all taped conversations. The tapes are being made to help explore the themes of the conversations we will engage in throughout the research process. We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, all tapes and transcriptions will be kept in a locked file and coded, and no actual names will be utilized when we write this research project. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</p> <p>_____ I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study</p> <p>_____ I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study</p>
What are the risks of this research?	There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project.
What are the benefits of this research?	This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about the experiences that academic advisors have through the course of their interactions with students. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the importance of academic advising, and the nature of the advising relationship.
Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?	<p>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</p>

Project Title:	Building Foundations: The Phenomenological Experience of Academic Advisors
What if I have questions?	<p>This research is being conducted by Paula F. Nadler at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr. Francine Hultgren at: 3112A Benjamin Building, 301-405-4562, or fh@umd.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678</p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>
Statement of Age of Subject and years	Your signature indicates that: you are at least 18
Consent	of age; the research has been explained to you; your questions have been fully answered; and you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.
Signature and Date	<p>NAME OF SUBJECT: _____</p> <p>SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT: _____</p> <p>DATE: _____</p>

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